THE VETERAN

Vietnam Veterans Against the War

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Putin's War on Ukraine Must Stop

Bill Branson and Joe Miller

From the VVAW National Office
March 25, 2022

In our 55 years as an organization, Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) has witnessed way too many wars. We know firsthand the consequences and devastation of imperial wars.

We are saddened and angered at the unnecessary death and destruction that Putin and Russian troops are raining down on the Ukrainian people. The damage to those living under the bombs, those fleeing, and those defending their country will not soon fade. To prevent further bloodshed and devastation, Putin and the Russian troops must immediately cease the bombing and withdraw all forces from Ukraine.

Just as VVAW supported the self-determination and the right of self-defense of the Vietnamese people, we support the rights of the Ukrainian people to determine their own destiny and defend themselves, free of outside coercion and threats.

All sectors of Ukrainian society are united in opposing the Russian aggression, not just those in uniform. Those in Russia who are able to break through the news blackout are also opposing Putin's unchecked aggression and paying the price. We call on Putin to release these political prisoners and let the Russian populace know what's really happening in Ukraine.

The chicken-hawks in Congress are calling for the US to unilaterally intervene. First, such intervention would only increase the deaths and damage, without providing a long-term solution.

Second, the US is part of the NATO alliance. Such intervention would trigger a European, and probably, world war.

The dangers of continued, unstopped Russian aggression are of grave concern. If Russia does not stop and withdraw or if the Ukrainian people concede, Putin will be emboldened. We could see a re-militarization of Europe, perhaps greater than that before WWII. Expansion of the war must be averted. The specter of nuclear war hangs over the world. All the more reason to re-emphasize calls for denuclearization.

Ukrainian citizens and soldiers, Russian citizens and conscripted soldiers—all are paying the price for Putin's war-mongering and imperial dreams. Working people and the poor are always the ones to bear the heaviest costs of war.

US politicians cannot confine themselves to screaming from the grandstands. The US has played NATO expansion against a paranoid and aggressive Putin for decades. A substantial amount of blame for the situation and a burden for reparations falls on this side of the ocean.

The US should immediately overhaul the Trump-era restrictions on immigration and open its doors to the ever-increasing flow of Ukrainian refugees, as well as others seeking refuge from oppressive regimes throughout the world.

VVAW remains committed to the struggle for peace and for social and economic justice for all people. We will continue to oppose senseless military adventures. We will do all we can to prevent future generations from being put through a similar tragedy and we will continue to demand dignity and respect for the victims and veterans of all wars.

Bill Branson and Joe Miller are board members of Vietnam Veterans Against the War.

VVAW Library Project - Open for Business

VVAW

We are excited to announce that construction on the VVAW/Pho Vinh Middle School Library in Duc Pho, Quang Ngai has been completed. The site is 30 minutes south of My Lai/ Son My. The library dedication took place December 22, 2021. The free-standing, two-story library is next to the current middle school and is now serving the students' needs.

For many years, John Zutz and the Milwaukee chapter of VVAW supported the efforts of Chuck Theusch and the Library of Vietnam Project. In 2018, VVAW supported a computer lab at one of the libraries.

For quite some time, John Zutz had been suggesting that VVAW should fully fund a library.

In 2018, we received a very large anonymous bequest. With that in hand we were able to fundraise the rest of what was needed and the project was set to begin in 2019. Complications with the original planned site and COVID delayed things quite a bit, but through the perseverance of Chuck and the partners in Vietnam, it is now fully operational.

We have already used extra funds raised to put a computer lab in the library, which was not part of the original plan.

As soon as students returned to school after the COVID-19 epidemic, they organized a lot of activities at the library. They put together a New Year's Day event to plant trees around the library.

They also encouraged students to read books at the library and organized the writing of book reviews to inspire their friends to read.

In addition, they also obtained books from the Zhi-Shan Foundation Project Organization with 11 bookcases for 11 classes. They are holding a book festival at the school library in April, 2022 with competitions to connect students to books. In the festival, the teachers and students will participate in an annual book donation for the school library.

Soon we are going to make plans with the Library Project and our partners in Vietnam to see other ways we can support the library. We hope your continued support will keep the library thriving.

Ribbon cutting at the VVAW/Pho Vinh Middle School Library, December 22, 2021.

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Murals painted by the students.

More photos on page 8.

The library and computer lab in use at the VVAW/Pho Vinh Middle School Library.

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MAY IT INSPIRE THE HOPES AND DREAMS
OF ALL WHO ENTER THESE DOORS
Dedication 22 December 2021

Thanks to Jeff Danziger and Billy Curmano for their cartoons.Thanks to Bill Ehrhart, Lorraine Cohen, Terry Coleman, Michael Orange, Joe Giannini, Marc Levy, Jim Smith, Jeri Reed, Andy Berman, and Daniel Corral and others for contributing photos.

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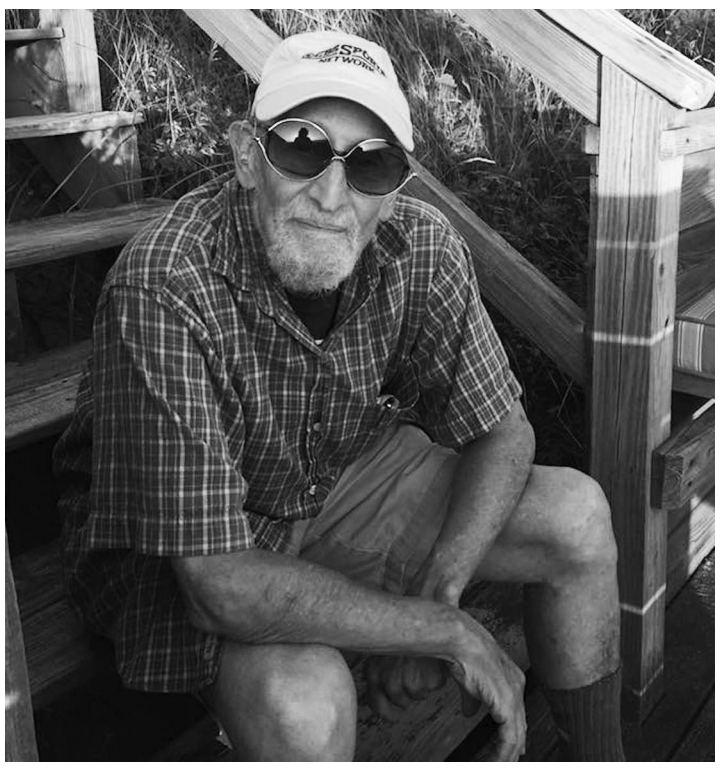

More information to follow in the Fall 2022 issue of The Veteran.

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Below is a list of VVAW coordinators and national staff. If you need a speaker or someone to interview, please contact the National Office via email at vvaw@vvaw.org or leave a message at (773) 569-3520 and we will put you in touch with the nearest VVAW member.

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The Oath I Keep

Meg Miner

Some members of a group called the Oath Keepers broke through barriers at the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, with the goal of preventing Congress from certifying the 2020 presidential election results. It was reported that the group is a veterans' organization. Video footage shows a group working their way through the crowd using a military or police-style formation. A leader of the group was recorded on an encrypted audio channel issuing instructions for some members to go to the Senate and others to go to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's office.

If Oath Keepers are veterans, I have two questions:

1) Of whose military?

2) And if they are US veterans, which oath are they following?

The oath I keep is to the Constitution. The Constitution explicitly rests power between three equal branches of government. We the people can and should make our opinions known to elected representatives but we the veterans do not get to pick and choose which part of the Constitution we will defend over any other part.

The Oath I took asserts a duty to obey lawful orders of presidents and officers. If these are US veterans, I wonder if they forgot their basic training instruction on the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ).

Trump gave no lawful orders that day. No active-duty military or inactive veteran can claim their US Oath of Office required them to obey. And they certainly can't claim their loyalty to an individual president takes precedence over their duty to the Constitution. Even a president can't trump the Constitution.

President Trump's exhortations to disrupt the Senate's responsibilities were not meant to inspire peaceful citizens. And let us also note that the coward even said he would meet the mob at the Capitol and then went back to the safety of the White House to watch the mayhem unfold.

This is not an article about former President Trump's actions that day. He certainly should be held responsible and with any luck, our Legislative branch will live up to its obligations under the Constitution someday. But this is also not an article about failed leadership among our legislators.

My complaint is with the people who claim a duty to the Constitution and then use the President as their shield to justify their actions. I have serious doubts about their fidelity to what comes out in their own public statements. It doesn't take long to see through to the lie.

Their website claims they are not aligned with particular politicians but that's a recent adaptation. The Internet Archives' Wayback machine holds over 6,000 views of their website since 2009 (search www.oathkeepers.org at http://web.archive.org/). In the weeks before the raid on the Capitol, the site shows them in lockstep with Trump's messages about the election and urging him to invoke the Insurrection Act.

The only way the involvement of a group like the Oath Keepers in the January 6, 2021 takeover of our Capitol makes sense is if we recognize that they are not interested in being part of representative democracy. It seems likely that any alignment with Trump was just their way of shielding themselves from sole responsibility for their actions.

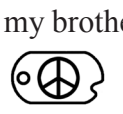
In a September 2019 publication titled "Department of Homeland Security Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism and Targeted Violence," the Department of Homeland Security defines terrorism as "any activity involving a criminally unlawful act that is dangerous to human life or potentially destructive of critical infrastructure or key resources, and that appears intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population, to influence government policy by intimidation or coercion, or to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping."

No peaceful but disgruntled Americans show up at a protest in paramilitary gear with weapons on themselves or with a ready supply of weapons nearby. Peaceful demonstrators don't execute tactical formations and carry zip tie cuffs to arrest elected members of the Legislative branch. They don't use fire extinguishers to beat police, break windows and force their way through the doors of the Senate, ransacking legislators' desks and offices. And they sure don't literally shit in the hallways of our Legislative house.

Call the people who broke into the Capitol on January 6, 2021, what they are: terrorists. This act of terror succeeded in one way. It instilled such fear in the hearts of faithless lawmakers that they now deny that anything out of the ordinary happened. The few people who have been brought to trial as of this writing, over a year later, have not faced serious consequences for their actions. Buried at the end of a recent *Associated Press* report is news that "eleven members and associates" of the Oath Keepers "have been charged with seditious conspiracy," but no one has been charged with terrorism. And that news sure hasn't been as prominent as the endless loop of footage showing the storming of the Capitol. Without a clear denunciation of these tactics and well-publicized penalties, it seems doubtful that this is the last we will see of these kinds of actions.

At least one person in the group was still on active duty. Why has his military chain of command failed to prosecute this clearly traitorous action? If convicted, let the UCMJ be the guide for punishment. Civilian veterans should be prosecuted in civilian courts to whatever level of punishment indicated by their actions.

All who entered the building that day participated in an attempt to overthrow our government. If the people who ransacked Congress are US veterans, they are Oath Breakers. They are not my brothers and sisters.



Meg Miner is a retired Gulf War-era veteran of the Air Force, joined VVAW in 2002 and became a member of the VVAW Board in 2017.

Here We Go Again

Here we go again,
Back in the saddle again,
War in Europe again,
Where "Kilroy was here"—

3rd Infantry Division, paratroop combat brigades,
B-52 bombers, fighter squadrons
On the move to front line positions
Facing the bearish threat of yore—

Been there before,
I grew up training to fight the Russians,
Hunkering in school hallways
In nuclear war drills—

Now a new generation of GIs
Is headed into the war zone
To face off with the Russian army
Rampaging across Ukraine—

Flashbacks flash across the TV,
Across my brain—
Dragging me back in time
To the world war where I was born

—*Jan Barry*

Driving I Remember

to note
sites which would be good for an ambush
walking I watch the ground for
dirt which may have been disturbed
in the laying of mines
fifty years later
I still expect the bullet
to hit that spot
just below my left scapula
that always itches
like a target

fifty years later
I remember when we were boy warriors
thrown together far from home

(gun smoke thick as fog
hot brass litter
the lamb-like smell of napalm
burnt indigenous personnel
pile of bodies
slowly moving limbs in rigor
greenthick Vietnamese jungle vines
sticky red clay mud in monsoon season)

if he wasn't part of that
piece of me that couldn't come home
maybe I could
remember my friend's face
fifty years later

—*Larry Kerschner (for Bob Pender*)

Fraggin'

Bill Shunas

Have right-wingers always been weird and I just missed it? Or has their weirdness been a twenty-first-century phenomenon? I'm not suggesting that they used to be nice or reasonable, but they were understandable. Nowadays they go beyond politics and approach some kind of an alternate reality. It used to be—okay you like Hitler? I can somewhat understand how you reasoned yourself into that position. And I hope that the next time you step into the street you get hit by an Amazon delivery van. But I can't understand how you concluded a child sex trafficking ring is operating out of a pizza parlor basement in Georgetown, and it's all connected to the Democratic Party.

I know a guy who won't get his COVID vaccination because, among other things, the shot implants a tracking device into your body. That way they always know where you are. Silly me. I went and got the three COVID shots. That means I may have three trackers in me. They will always know where I am. Bummer.

That reminds me. Back in the early seventies, we kept up our anti-war, anti-government lives. I had a cat. His name was Miliano, named after Emiliano Zapata. One day Miliano came home with his foot all torn up. To the vet we went. They kept him overnight. I picked him up the next morning. The foot was fixed, but so was his shoulder. The vet berated me for not noticing the shoulder wound which was now stitched. I swear I brought him in with no shoulder wound. Anyway, not too long after that, I read about the government implanting listening devices in people's pets. Miliano! It all made no sense. We never had meetings at my place, and I never took him to meetings. So, Miliano probably never transmitted any subversive talk to the government. Unless I talked in my sleep. Nowadays all you need is a vaccine. This may be an example of primitive versus modern medicine and spycraft.

Not all of these new right folks think they'll be injected with trackers. Some will have other problems with the vaccine. One such worry is that you'll become magnetized. Brings back memories of Doctor Strangelove. Remember the movie? His arm appeared to be magnetized. Must have been a vaccine. He'd lower it, but then, like a giant magnet had control it would snap back into a Nazi salute. There's the fate some are afraid of if you had the jab. They shouldn't complain. It's a salute they might be proud to show their kids.

So, you have a choice. With your vaccine, you can either get a tracker or be magnetized. And you get a free red MAGA cap. With these choices maybe that's why so many avoid the jab. They'd rather take a chance with the virus. As long as they get a MAGA cap. Like many things these days, getting a jab—or not—is a political statement. The dumb don't get jabbed. They get Trump.

Talking about dumb. Many MAGA hats were seen at the 6 January event. And several are doing jail time. There were casualties at that event, including six deaths, and people need to be punished for that. But it seemed like such a poor excuse for an insurrection. It was like taking a knife to a gunfight. They deluded themselves into thinking that large numbers would rise up and reinstate carrot top as Commander in Chief. And Trump was there arousing their passions, and then he disappeared when the mob started committing felonies that got them nowhere. There was a lack of strategy and a lack of numbers with no leadership. If this was an example of the master race in action, those people should think about switching to an old-fashioned cult.

I wonder about the one out of six or seven people who believe some of these off-the-wall ideas. Political conspiracies are enjoyable in movies, but you better not let them guide your behavior. People who thought you were a fool would then know you are. But you might be right—the government does restrict freedom. They tell you freedom is not free. Then they raise your taxes. Then they regulate your behavior because freedom is not free. Next thing you know they'll take your firstborn, put him or her in uniform and send them off to develop PTSD. And sometimes they control you in ways not evident. Be careful around cats.

When Russia invaded Ukraine, it was impressive how Poland and Hungary were ready to care for Ukrainian refugees. They were prepared before the fighting started. Camps were set up. Places to shelter were ready. There were cots, food, water, and whatever was needed. Transportation was ready. People opened their homes to refugees.

While those European countries aiding refugees are deservedly praised, there is a shadow over their efforts. They have deliberately rejected some non-white Africans who had been living in Ukraine and made it harder for them to access services. The rescuers couldn't put aside race and just do the righteous humanitarian things that they are doing for white people.

Overall, though, compare this effort to the mistreatment of refugees at the US-Mexican border. Some of these are victims of smaller wars and persecutions, but they are refugees in need. They are in need of humanitarian aid the same as refugees in Poland. Family values do not apply at the US-Mexican border. Children are separated from their parents. Usually, the situation is ignored. Once in a while, the media comes by for a story. Conditions are dire.

Among the unwelcomers, many were wearing MAGA hats. They're ever vigilant of who might be coming to infect their society. Heavens! Maybe all of them and their children will become Democrats. Although, I suspect some Democrats don't want them either.

Bill Shunas is a Vietnam veteran, author, and long-time VVAW member.

The Double Standard of War

Fred Samia

To Aeschylus' dictum that truth is war's first casualty should perhaps be added "perspective." What we believe in and then put our energies into often depends on our perspective of the event observed. And perspective is influenced by what we think we know; and in this digital day and age, more and more, that "knowledge" flows from increasingly limited and controlled sources. It's not so much that we are told what to think (at least not in the West, and at least not yet), but rather the breadth of what we are given to think about flows from a diaphragm widened or reduced at the behest and service of fewer and fewer entities. (And it's more important than ever to know the difference between knowledge and information.)

Several days into the invasion of Ukraine, a widely circulated photograph of two high-rise buildings hit by rockets drew international condemnation for Russia's seeming wanton attack on civilians. The photo, however, was of an Israeli airstrike in Gaza in May of last year, which passed then with little to no outrage expressed even though those targeted were also innocent.

Russia, of course, should be condemned for its unprovoked and brutal attack on Ukraine. But in the rush to excoriate Putin and his supporters, such as Belorussian president, Lukashenko, no mention is made of the invasion and occupation by the United States (and its "Coalition of the Willing") of Iraq and Afghanistan. No moral judgments invoked for the destruction and devastation those wars caused and continue to cause in those countries. No sanctions enforced. No question asked as to what right was invoked to justify the attacks nor by what authority they were executed. That same silence, with notable exceptions, met Israel's military assault on the sovereign nation of Lebanon in the early 1980s that resulted in 50,000 casualties and vast destruction to villages and cities, including Beirut, as well as much of the country's infrastructure. Nor are Palestinians praised as freedom fighters when they strike back at those who have occupied their territory for the past 74 years.

Millions of Ukrainian refugees are finding shelter and care in neighboring countries as well as further distanced EU nations like England and Germany. From very nearly the beginning of Russia's invasion the borders to those countries have been open; visa and passport requirements removed and residency requirements relaxed. Again, this is the right thing to do, to care for our sisters and brothers less fortunate. And yet again here we see how perspective affects perception. Numerous Western commentators, pundits and politicians have referred to Ukrainian refugees as being so like the people in the countries taking them in, which, frequently, is a not very veiled reference to their skin and eye color and to their culture and lifestyle. Light-complected and eyed Ukrainians flow across borders to a mass of material and financial assistance. Contrast that with how refugees from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East have recently been treated by these same countries. A few years ago, Syrian refugees fleeing their war-devastated country were beaten and shot by Turkish border police, resulting in several deaths. And just last year thousands of asylum seekers from the Middle East, Africa and South Asia were stuck in a dense forest along the Polish-Belarussian border from where news footage showed the Polish army beating them back across the border into Belarus. Some refugees, it would seem, are more deserving of our sympathy and assistance than others.

Is it fair to compare these events? Depends on one's perspective. And especially one's perspective of the truth—truth being a seemingly viscous and fungible commodity these days, except that the information exchanged no longer needs to be equitable, and in fact is often the complete opposite. The truth is whatever those at the podium declare it to be: whether a claim of a stolen election or the rightness of the "liberation" of a country from "neo-Nazis" or "religious fundamentalists." When truth is no longer anchored to fact, one's very existence is called into question. I think, therefore I am, can easily be modified to: You are not entitled to an opinion; therefore you don't exist.

Here's a truth: no good whatsoever comes from any war. We know this, or should know it, by undeniable historical experience. There are only losers in war. War creates war; becomes a fire-breathing hydra spreading death and devastation. How, at this stage in our "evolution," humankind has not learned that, has not had it seared into its DNA, is unfathomable.

As of this writing (3/25/2022), Ukraine is claiming to have killed as many as 7,000 Russian soldiers, and though this may be an inflated number, it is certain that many hundreds, if not thousands, have been killed and injured. Our first reaction might be joy (as well as surprise that the vastly out-numbered and out-equipped Ukrainian forces are doing so well) to see the invaders get their comeuppance. But, as someone who was a "troop," I can also feel for those who were manipulated into believing in the justness of the cause they were recruited to, just as I was. There are reports that conscripts are filling out the Russian ranks, though this is denied by Putin's military leaders. And most army enlistees are from rural, less developed areas and poorer towns of Russia. As in this country, the military is seen as a way out of poverty for those young men, or at least as a means of attaining a better life because there are no living wage jobs available. So, in essence, there as here, there is a de facto economic draft.

After birthing a child with a severe genetic disease caused by both parents carrying a damaged gene (1:1-million odds) a couple I know was able to have a normal child after doctors determined that the new fertilized egg was not damaged. A small example of the wondrous good that humankind is capable of, and makes the on-going disease of war that much more senseless and horrific. If all of our energies, resources and will went to doing good, a near paradise could be engendered here on planet Earth.

That won't happen, though, until the double-standard of how we treat all our sisters and brothers is no longer.

Fred Samia is a free-lance journalist who has worked in the Middle East. He served in Vietnam with A Co, 3rd Tanks, 3rd Mar Div, 1967-68; his eight decorations include the Purple Heart. He has been a member of VVAW since 1970.

Thanks to those who have put VVAW in their wills. These gifts have have helped VVAW keep on keeping on and have contributed to the building of the library in Vietnam we are sponsoring. If you would like to put VVAW in your will and don't know how, contact the National Office at vvaw@vvaw.org. VVAW is a tax exempt 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

Biden's Sanctions on Afghanistan Threaten to Kill More Civilians than Two Decades of War

MARK WEISBROT

This article was published by USA Today on March 10, 2022.

When President Joe Biden decided to withdraw the US military from Afghanistan last year, much of America's news media came down on him like a ton of bricks. Republicans piled on, calling the withdrawal an "unmitigated disaster."

But getting out was the right move.

In fact, the real mistake was the opposite: The Biden administration did not end the war but continued it by other means, which are turning out to be more violent and destabilizing. The economic sanctions imposed by the United States and its allies are causing widespread, severe hunger in this desperately poor country.

$7 billion in central bank reserves

Unless those sanctions are soon reversed, it is estimated that more people will die from the economic impact of sanctions over the next year than the number who died in 20 years of war.

The most destructive economic sanction is the US confiscation of more than $7 billion in international reserves belonging to Afghanistan's central bank. The reserves are needed for essential imports such as food and medicine, but also for the central bank to play its normal role in maintaining a functioning financial system and economic stability.

Aid groups trying to distribute food and save peoples' lives cannot in many cases move the necessary funds, and the health care system has been collapsing.

World Bank data released last month shows that food prices increased at an estimated 40% annual rate since August, putting food out of reach of many poor Afghans.

Children "at risk of dying due to severe acute malnutrition"

As a result of all this economic disruption, including the loss of billions of dollars of aid, 22.8 million people—more than half the population—are facing acute food insecurity. They include a million children under 5 "at risk of dying due to severe acute malnutrition," according to UNICEF.

It is not clear why the Biden administration has imposed such devastating sanctions on Afghanistan. The sanctions do not seem to be directed at overthrowing the Taliban. Rather, it could be that the Biden administration, after its bad political experience with the military withdrawal, does not want to take the risk of appearing to be "soft" on the Taliban.

This is a political miscalculation as well as a moral one. The lethal effects of US sanctions in other countries have been mostly ignored because the sanctions have been widely misunderstood as punishing governments, rather than whole populations. But the case of Afghanistan is beginning to correct this misunderstanding.

The most influential humanitarian organizations are explaining the grim chain of causality in public.

David Miliband, former British foreign secretary and head of the International Rescue Committee, which has 3,000 staff in Afghanistan, told the US Senate last month: "The proximate cause of this starvation crisis is the international economic policy which has been adopted since August, and which has cut off financial flows not just to the public sector, but in the private sector in Afghanistan as well."

At the same hearing, Graeme Smith of the International Crisis Group told senators: "You need to address the reason why people are hungry, which is the collapse of the economy mostly due to Western economic restrictions."

Families of the victims of 9/11

On February 11, the Biden administration issued an executive order to allocate Afghanistan's central bank funds: Half of it ($3.5 billion) would be "for the benefit of the Afghan people," and the other half would be for families of the victims of the September 11 terrorist attack, pending the outcome of legal claims.

In other words, none of the $7 billion Washington is holding would be returned to the central bank. Therefore, it continues the destruction of the Afghan economy and the resulting mass starvation. No amount of foreign aid will make up for that, and so far, it's not clear how the Afghan people will benefit from the $3.5 billion reserved for them.

As for the pending lawsuits, this appears to be a political distraction. The legal issues are not at all clear and could take years to resolve. How many poor people in Afghanistan should die to protect the US government from the possibility that it could end up with a tiny addition to its budget for this compensation? Relatives of 9/11 victims who have spoken publicly about these questions have said, emphatically, that they don't want to take any money away from people in Afghanistan.

Fertile ground for terrorists

Human Rights Watch immediately criticized the executive order, noting that the "restrictions on the banking system" are "intensifying the country's already serious human rights crisis." Other groups and experts concerned with humanitarian issues joined in.

If Afghanistan continues to descend into a nightmare of starvation, suffering, and death, the Biden administration will not escape blame for this, as well as for the refugee crisis. More than a million Afghans are estimated to have fled since August.

The Biden administration also will be blamed if the result is a failed state that allows for the establishment of a center for terrorist activity and recruitment, as happened in Syria when the Islamic State emerged there. Nearly 50 members of Congress warned Biden in a letter that economic collapse in Afghanistan due to US sanctions "could create ungoverned spaces, and enable resentment against the US, producing fertile ground for groups like ISIS to gain strength."

Of course, the most important reason to end this nightmare is that these sanctions are threatening the lives of hundreds of thousands, and possibly millions, of innocent people.

But if there are people in the Biden administration looking at this in strictly political terms, the political risks of destroying the Afghan economy are much greater than any potential fallout from Republican complaints about returning these reserves. Which, after all, belong to the central bank and the Afghans.

The sooner this is done, along with unfreezing money from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, the sooner the economy can recover—as David Beasley, the head of the World Food Program, has noted. And more civilians—especially children, who are disproportionately killed by severe food shortages—will live.

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Could Ukraine Be About Oil?

ALLEN MEECE

Before the second invasion of Iraq, President George Dubya was wondering what to call his bold battle. "How about Operation Iraqi Liberation?" he asked. An advisor said, "No, that spells 'OIL' and would give us away."

2022 minus 1964 makes fifty-eight years since my destroyer was chased out of the Tonkin Gulf by five torpedo boats doing fifty knots while my Sherman Class destroyer was struggling to muster 28 knots. We were firing our five-inch guns at them as fast as we could to keep them more than five miles away and out of torpedo range. We knew destroyers sink ten minutes after being hit by a torpedo.

I was twenty years old when I saw the torpedo boats closing and the dust falling out of our ceiling wires from the recoil throughout the ship from our every gunshot.

The Navy told us in bootcamp that we were protecting democracy against the monolithic communist bloc that wanted to take over Vietnam as the first falling domino in a plan to own the world. That included dominating America. We assumed that included taking our girlfriends and our cars. We had to fight.

After we got over there, it seemed like we were just bullying a little guy who wanted to rebuild his country after French colonial exploitation. He wanted to be left alone to be independent and free, the same as we wanted to be. So what if they used socialist techniques to do that? Frontier America started that way.

My multimillion-dollar warship was four hundred feet long and had a crew of two-hundred and fifty. It was running from a fast motorboat that had four torpedoes and a crew of five. It wasn't a fair fight and it didn't seem right. It didn't feel like an American thing to do, killing little guys with big, expensive high-tech weapons because they exercised their sovereign right to run their country their way. They lived half-a-world away and weren't hurting us.

We had a multibillion-dollar aircraft carrier waiting outside the Gulf with five thousand people and a squadron of fighter jets that we radioed for help. By the time they scrambled and reached us, the enemy boats could not be found.

Eleven years later and fifty-eight thousand American military deaths later, we turned around and walked away from Vietnam after we had enough of the bloody stalemate. We finally left them alone without an adult explanation for the madness and no apology for the atrocity the CIA started.

Here's an adult explanation for those ten years of insane violence; we were "protecting American Interests." What does that mean? American Interests are corporate global revenue streams. Sorry, world. American government is being purchased by its corporations that believe a healthy revenue stream is worth a war.

In America, the propaganda of commerce has perfused our culture so much that we believe that capitalism means democracy and freedom. So America has to go to war to protect sacrosanct democracy and never acknowledges that it is about capital gains; killing for profit. We won't admit to the possession of that much disrespect for human life.

Today, Vietnam is a "most-favored" trading nation. Americans go to that lovely country to enjoy good vacations and get treated cordially. We mutated their plants and people with Agent Orange chemical defoliant and dropped more bombs on them than we did on the rest of the world in World War II. That's a lot of tonnage.

With total respect and love for our injured and fallen comrades in arms, one could plausibly say that the Vietnam-American war was a ghastly decade of waste. The lesson of Vietnam is that our entire country and its government can be wrong, horribly wrong for a long time. Citizens have a duty to deny service to an erroneous war. Probably, if you can manage to look behind the veil, you'll see that every war is a "grave" error.

Us Vietnam vets expected that our lesson was horrible enough to never be forgotten. It perhaps would have been worth our sacrifice if the government never did anything like that again.

Twenty-five years later came the invasion into Afghanistan and two whole decades of wastage and fear of death for thirty-eight million Afghans. Again, we walked away after failing to turn them into a suburban Little America. Again, we made no apology for leaving the country worse than we found it. We'll send them some welfare checks, maybe. Dollars can make anyone happy. Can't they?

And now I am hearing the same emotional war cries I heard before. Our President is making brutish threats to the Russian President for invading Ukraine, saying, "there will be severe consequences, heavy prices to pay." That is not diplomacy, that is saber-rattling. It encourages a descent to anger and violence. An intelligent leader would know that any amount of difficult diplomacy and empathetic counseling with the distressed Russian leader named Vladimir Putin, is better than warfare. It might actually be better for the world if Russia were allowed to annex Ukraine. That is too hard to judge. There is too much propaganda out there and not enough truth data about the Ukrainian story for the casual citizen to perceive what's going on.

But, except for World War II, the history of American foreign wars is indisputable: Don't go there!

Our war department is called the Department of Defense for a very good and basic reason. The DoD is for defending, not offending. There is a United Nations to handle foreign problems and we should support the UN and not be like misinformed cops who do more harm than good because they work for "business interests." They work for the profiteers, not for peace. And war is extremely profitable for the monster aerospace and 'defense' industries.

Oh, to help you consider what this latest war stuff might be about, hear what the US International Trade Administration says; "Ukraine has approximately 900 BILLION cubic meters of proven reserves of natural gas." Same old story: Shout loud and often about freedom but go to war for the energy which is there. Energy is THE American Interest.

"Hell no, we won't go," we said in 1964. History proved us correct. Don't go there this time either…

ALLEN MEECE IS THE AUTHOR OF "TIN CAN" A VIETNAM WAR NAVAL NOVEL OF THE TONKIN GULF INCIDENTS. IT IS AVAILABLE ONLINE FROM AMAZON.COM

Smedley Darlington Butler: From Consummate Imperialist to Strident Anti-Imperialist

W. D. Ehrhart

A recently published book, *Gangsters of Capitalism: Smedley Butler, the Marines, and the Making and Breaking of America's Empire* by Jonathan Katz, is finally bringing much-needed mainstream attention to one of the most fascinating Americans of the 20th century.

My connection to Butler goes back to the summer of 1966 when I arrived at US Marine Corps boot camp at Parris Island, South Carolina, at the age of 17. We learned all sorts of things that summer, but one thing we learned was the names of the two Marines who had each won not one, but two Medals of Honor: Dan Daly and Smedley Butler.

Butler would have received three Medals of Honor if the award had been available to officers during the Boxer Rebellion in 1900 China. Every enlisted man on a patrol he led as a teenage lieutenant received one, but he was instead awarded the Marine Corps Brevet Medal, the highest decoration for bravery then available to commissioned officers.

In the course of his career, he also received the Navy Distinguished Service Medal, the Army Distinguished Service Medal, the French Order of the Black Star, two decorations from the Haitian government, and ten campaign medals.

But our drill instructors didn't tell us about the book Butler wrote called *War Is a Racket*. And they didn't teach us what Butler came to believe about himself:

"I spent 33 years and four months in active military service and during that period I spent most of my time as a high class muscle man for Big Business, for Wall Street and the bankers. In short, I was a racketeer, a gangster for capitalism. I helped make Mexico and especially Tampico safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenues in. I helped in the raping of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefit of Wall Street. I helped purify Nicaragua for the International Banking House of Brown Brothers in 1902-1912. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for the American sugar interests in 1916. I helped make Honduras right for the American fruit companies in 1903. In China in 1927 I helped see to it that Standard Oil went on its way unmolested. Looking back on it, I might have given Al Capone a few hints. The best he could do was to operate his racket in three districts. I operated on three continents."

I only began to learn the whole story of Smedley Darlington Butler's remarkable life during the Reagan Wars against the peasants of Central America in the 1980s, a part of the world where Butler had spent much of his career in the first 30 years of the 20th century.

Butler, it turns out, was an 1898 graduate of the Haverford School for Boys, then known as the Haverford College Grammar School. And as chance would have it, I was hired in January 2001 to teach English and history at the Haverford School (THS) by then-headmaster and retired 30-year US Army colonel Dr. Joseph T. Cox.

Ten years into my 18-year stay, Cox got an email from a 1969 graduate named Fred Housel who had been a "Lifer" at THS, and who had stumbled by accident upon Butler's story while doing unrelated research. Housel asked Cox, "How could I spend 13 years at Haverford and never have heard a word about Smedley Butler?" Cox's reply was, "You should talk to Bill Ehrhart. He's a big Smedley Butler fan."

The answer to Fred's question was easy: after Butler retired from the Corps in the early 1930s, when he began speaking out against what he saw as unjustifiable foreign interventions and what today we would call "the military-industrial complex," the then rich white Republican Philadelphia Main Line clientele of the Haverford School deemed Butler a traitor to "his class," and wrote him out of the school's history. He simply ceased to be.

Until I arrived, that is. From the first day I began teaching there, I had a large poster of Butler hanging in my classroom. Along with a full-length photograph of Butler, the poster included his famous "racketeer for capitalism" quote, which originally appeared in *Common Sense*, a magazine published by socialists in the tradition of Eugene Debs and Robert La Follette, in November 1935. Below the poster, I added my own sign identifying him as a Haverford School alumnus.

Housel was not pleased to learn that his alma mater had erased Butler from its institutional conscience, and made a substantial donation to the school in return for resurrecting Butler's connection to the school. My classroom was dedicated to Butler's memory, and now bears a plaque attesting to this. An oil painting of Butler in uniform, painted by a student, now hangs just outside the upper school admissions office. And on the campus, circling one of the trees is the Smedley Butler Bench, which carries six brass plates reading:

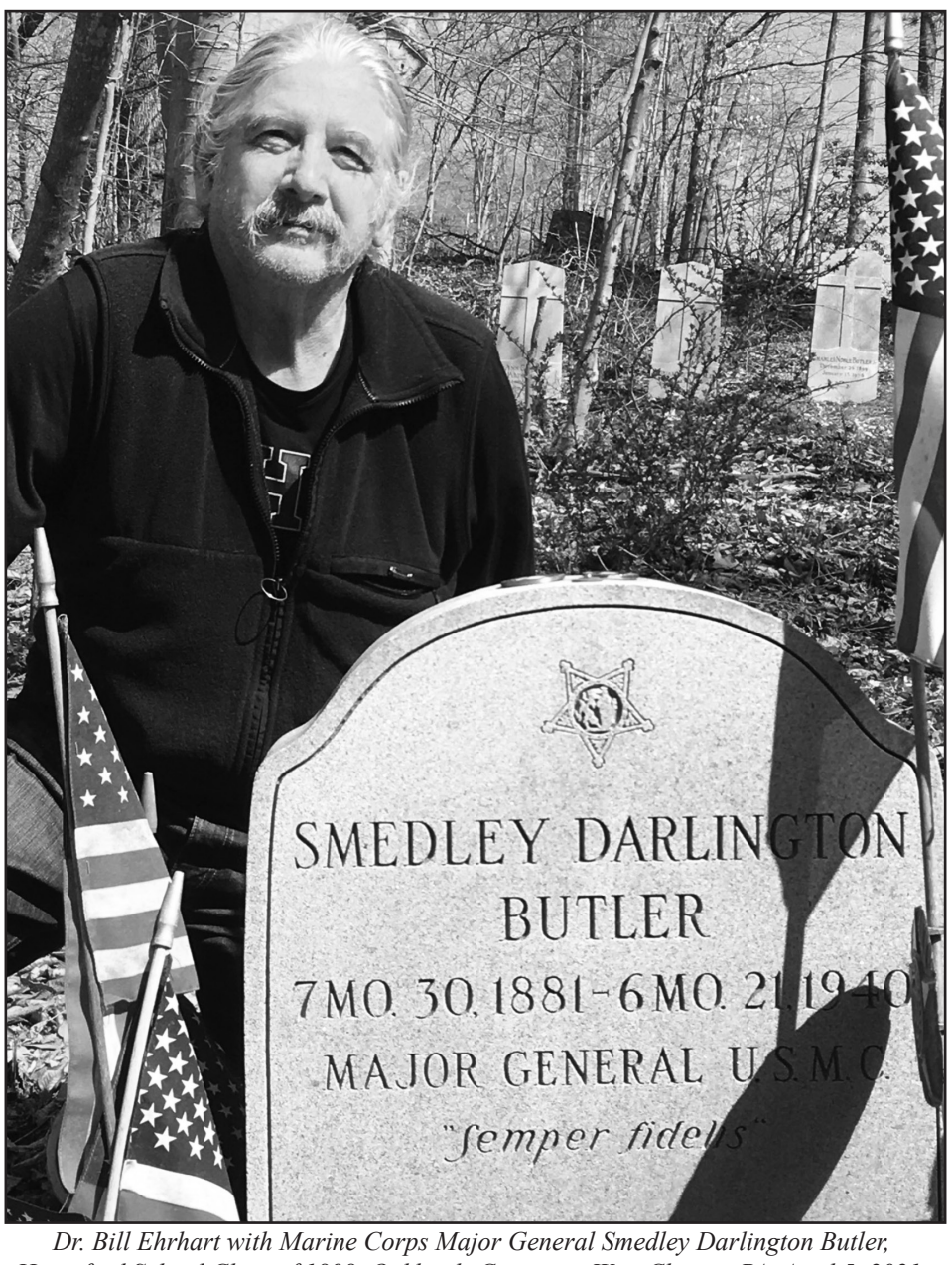
Panel 1
Smedley Darlington Butler
1881–1940
The Haverford School Class of 1898
Husband of Ethel Conway Peters Butler
Father of Ethel, Smedley, Jr., & Thomas
Incorruptible Outspoken Patriot
His was a life of Courage, Respect & Honesty

Panel 2
A native of West Chester, Pennsylvania,the son of a Congressman, Butler was captain of the Haverford School baseball team and quarterback of the football team. Not yet 17, he enlisted in the Marines in 1898without waiting for graduation,but was nevertheless awarded his diploma.

Panel 3
During a career spanning over 33 years, Butler rose from 2nd lieutenant to major general. He served in the US, the Philippines, China, Panama, Honduras, Nicaragua, Mexico, Haiti, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and France, earning not one but two Medals of Honor, the Marine Corps Brevet Medal, and both the Army and Navy Distinguished Service Medals.

Panel 4
From January 1924 through December 1925, Butler took a leave of absence from the Corps to serve as Philadelphia's Director of Public Safety. Charged with enforcing prohibition and rooting out municipal corruption, he later said: "Cleaning up Philadelphia was worse than any battle I was ever in."

Panel 5
After retiring from the Corps in 1931, Butler became an advocate for veterans and a critic of American military adventurism. In 1932, he supported the Great War "Bonus Marchers." In a 1935 essay, he titled *War Is a Racket*, he described himself as having been "a muscleman for Big Business," "a racketeer," and "a gangster for capitalism."



Dr. Bill Ehrhart with Marine Corps Major General Smedley Darlington Butler, Haverford School Class of 1898, Oaklands Cemetery, West Chester, PA, April 5, 2021.

Panel 6
Nicknamed variously the Maverick Marine, the Fighting Quaker, the Fighting Devil of the Devil Dogs, the Fighting Hell-Devil Marine, the Stormy Petrel of the Marine Corps, General Duckboard & Old Gimlet Eye, Butler himself concluded, "To Hell with War!"

Butler earned the nickname "Maverick Marine" because he repeatedly found himself in trouble with his superiors in the military and the government; he had no patience with bureaucracy, red tape, or armchair strategists, and always put the welfare of the men under his command before everything else.

In the Philippines, early in his career, he was nearly cashiered for defying orders and commandeering a Navy tug to deliver food and supplies to his isolated command, largely dismantling the tug to build a pier from which to offload his cargo once he'd returned to the outpost where his men were stationed.

Awarded a Medal of Honor in Mexico in 1914 that he did not feel he deserved, he was told that he had to accept it and wear it, or face court-martial.

Sent to France in 1918, but denied the combat command he desperately wanted, he was assigned instead to command a transient camp for soldiers coming and going between the States and the trenches on the Western Front. Appalled by the unsanitary living conditions at the camp, and refused permission to obtain adequate supplies to upgrade the camp's facilities, he organized a work party that raided a government warehouse in broad daylight and "liberated" the duckboards, shovels, and tents he needed, thus earning him the nickname "General Duckboard."

Butler was not without his warts and blemishes. He loved the adrenalin rush of combat, the sheer challenge, and the excitement of it. First as a young lieutenant, and repeatedly throughout his career, he complained in letters to his congressman father that the policies he was enforcing in countries like Nicaragua, Honduras, and Haiti were corrupt and immoral, benefitting only the white wealthy ruling class in America, yet he continued his career in the Corps for more than three decades. He began to speak out only after he'd gotten too old and too far up the hierarchy to be allowed to engage in actual combat.

But once he began to speak out, he would not be silenced. Even while still in the Corps, he publicly criticized Benito Mussolini, calling fascist Italy a "mad-dog nation," and causing an international diplomatic scandal for which Herbert Hoover would have had him court-martialed but for the public outcry in support of Butler.

Later, in 1932, he vocally supported the Great War Bonus Marchers who had fought for their country as young men but were now, at the height of the Great Depression, unable to support themselves or their families. They had come to Washington to ask that their wartime service bonus, due to be paid in 1945, be paid to them now when they desperately needed it. Visiting their encampment on Anacostia Flats, Butler spoke to the men and their families from the roof of a car, telling them that they had as much right to lobby Congress as any corporation did, and calling their gathering "the greatest display of Americanism in history."

Shortly thereafter, when Army Chief of Staff Douglas MacArthur, aided by Major George Patton and Major Dwight Eisenhower, ordered an attack against the men who MacArthur himself had commanded in France fifteen years earlier, forcibly driving them and their families out of their encampment with tanks, machine guns, tear gas, and cavalry, Butler was outraged. Already no fan of the arrogant and imperial MacArthur, Butler subsequently declared himself a "Hoover-for-Ex-President-Republican."

Perhaps most amazing of all, Butler was approached by wealthy Republican financiers and industrialists interested in persuading Butler to lead what would have amounted to a coup d'etat against Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal, using veterans from the conservative American Legion as a front for the interests of Big Business. It would have been the end of

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Blood on Their Tuxes

Peter P. Mahoney

Shortly after I arrived in New York—having been elected as a National Coordinator for VVAW at the Houston Steering Committee Meeting—on May 8, 1972, President Nixon announced the mining of the North Vietnamese harbors. VVAW denounced the action as the latest escalation in a war that was supposed to be winding down. A press conference was called by several New York City peace groups to announce plans to protest this escalation. I was chosen to be the VVAW spokesman at the press conference, and I announced on national TV that unless the United Nations took the government of the United States into receivership until such time as a government representative of the people could be elected, then in seventy-two hours, VVAW was going to take over the United Nations.

Of course, VVAW had neither the desire nor the capability to "take over" the United Nations, any more than the United Nations had any desire or capability to do anything about the US government, but if VVAW had learned anything, it was the value of symbolic action.

On the day our ultimatum expired, the sidewalk in front of the United Nations building had a New York City cop standing about every ten feet. We had separated our group into three teams. One team was able to get invited onto a regularly scheduled UN tour, and actually got into the building itself. A second team approached the main entrance gate, and started to make a ruckus. As expected, the line of cops along the sidewalk immediately gravitated towards the commotion. A third team—of which I was a member—had been watching from an office building across the street from the UN. Once we saw the cops abandoning their posts, we ran across the street, pushed through the hedge and scaled the low wall that separated the UN grounds from the street. All of us had chains wrapped around our bodies, with the intent to try to chain ourselves somewhere visible along the front of the building to symbolically "take over" the UN. We hadn't, however, accounted for how much the weight of the chains limited our mobility, and although we managed to get over the wall, we were quickly subdued by UN security personnel before we could chain ourselves to anything, and after a bit of roughing up by them, we were summarily ejected from the grounds. The team on the tour managed to barricade themselves in the UN chapel for a brief period before they, too, were ejected from the premises. Although we hadn't succeeded in what we had planned, we got good local news coverage that evening, and one channel even had footage of the cops running to the ruckus, and our team then running across the street and scaling the wall.

Our antics at the UN inspired a new possibility. Next day, we received a call at the VVAW office from some students who attended Riverdale High School up in the Bronx. They told us that the United Nations Association was holding a black tie dinner in their gym that evening to honor George and Barbara Bush, Bush being the US ambassador to the United Nations at that time. The students suggested that if VVAW wanted to get into the dinner, they could arrange to meet us at a back door and let us in.

We devised a similar plan to the one executed at the UN. We broke into two teams. One team approached the front door to the school, and started to chant anti-war slogans. Immediately, all the security for the place rushed to focus on these few. Diversionary tactics were a favorite ploy VVAW used against the cops, because the cops almost always fell for them. Meanwhile, the second team of five people—Danny Friedman, Brian Mattarese, Mark O'Connor, Ann Hirschman, and myself—met the students at the designated spot, and got inside the building. The students led us through what seemed like a maze of corridors until we reached the door of the gym. We burst in on the tuxedoed, evening-gowned crowd seated at the tables, and Brian gave a short anti-war speech, the last line of which was "The blood of the Vietnamese people is on your hands." We then proceeded to throw balloons full of blood (actually, red clothing dye) at the assemblage, and made our escape, before any of the startled dignitaries could react. We all got away scott free.

Peter Mahoney, 1972.

Now, as far as a "demonstration" goes, this one was probably a total failure. The purpose of a demonstration is to attract as much attention as possible to the message you want to convey, usually through trying to get the media to cover it. No one knew about what happened in that Riverdale High School gym that night except those who were there, although Karl Becker—my erstwhile friend and government informer—testified about it at the Gainesville 8 trial as proof of my "violent" nature. One of the other National Coordinators derisively dismissed it as pure adventurism, serving only to give a bunch of adrenaline junkies their latest fix. That was probably true. Yet, of all the various demonstrations I participated in during my lifetime, this one somehow was one of the most satisfying. Maybe it was the fact that we pulled it off and got away, but I think it was more than that. Most demonstrations you feel like you're beating your head against a stone wall, and those with the money and power are sitting there casually drinking their tea, blithely unconcerned with the rabble banging their bloody heads against the wall that protects them. This one time, they had to look us in the eyes, and, if only briefly, we got to disrupt their genteel indifference.

Peter P. Mahoney was one of the Gainesville 8. He now lives in Vermont.

Students painting a mural at the VVAW/Pho Vinh Middle School Library.

Smedley Darlington Butler

continued from page 6

American democracy and the beginning of American fascism.

These men chose Butler because they knew that Butler commanded the loyalty and love of ordinary soldiers and veterans. He had put men before mission all his life, and the rank-and-file knew it and revered him for it. But these rich un-American Americans utterly misunderstood who Butler was and what he believed in. Instead of joining the conspiracy, Butler informed Congress of the plot, putting an end to it.

Butler, by this time, had become deeply isolationist, insisting that "there are only two things we should fight for. One is the defense of our homes, and the other is the Bill of Rights. War for any other reason is simply a racket." We'll never know how Butler would have responded to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor since Butler died in 1940. We do know that he didn't think we should have military bases outside the continental US in the first place, and that included Hawaii, and we do know that as early as the late 1920s he warned that continued US possession of the Philippines would almost certainly lead to war with Japan.

What Butler would have thought about the state of American democracy in the early 21st century is once again a matter of sheer speculation. But he did come to believe—and he made no secret of it—that the key fault line in American life was economic class. By the very early 1930s, even before the election of FDR, he was openly advocating major public works spending, a federal jobs guarantee, stronger labor unions, higher wages for workers, and a federal old-age pension. While never a pacifist, he broke with FDR in the 1936 election because he felt Roosevelt was leading the nation toward war, voting instead for the Socialist Party's Norman Thomas.

We will simply never know, of course, but I fully believe that Butler would feel right at home with Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, would be livid over the events of January 6th, and even more outraged by the response from the Grand Old Party of which he had once been a member. Would that Butler were here today to help put an end to our current drift toward fascism and one-party dictatorship. Were Butler with us now, I wouldn't be surprised if he insisted on becoming a member of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. He would certainly fit right in.

W.D. Ehrhart received the Purple Heart Medal, Navy Combat Action Ribbon, and a Division Commander's Commendation for his service as a Marine in Vietnam. He is the author of Thank You for Your Service: Collected Poems.

VVAW Library Project - Completed

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THE VETERAN
SECTION B
Volume 52, Number 1 Spring 2022

The Last Patrol: 1972

AS TOLD TO RICHARD STACEWICZ

From Richard Stacewicz's Winter Soldiers pages 307-313.

With the end of the Democratic convention, VVAW members converged on Miami for the Republican convention. Veterans began to arrive in Miami Beach on August 19 and 20 to prepare for the convention, which was to take place between August 21 and August 24, 1972.

Ann Hirschman (AH): First we got the land opened up. The day we opened the land was a day before the vets' convoy came.

John Kniffin: These convoys were coming from three different parts of the country—the northeast, west, [and] midwest—all converging on Miami. They were so massive that at one point they completely blocked the Tamiami freeway when some cop was rash enough to tell the lead car to pull over for going below the speed limit. So the lead car pulled over to one of these cop stations and everybody started following him. They ended up filling up the substation parking lot and blocking up all four lanes of the Tamiami freeway before the cop says, "Get out of here."

Lee Thorn: Coming down the east coast, they stopped off at all these military bases. Every time they got to a military base, the doors opened, the guys went in, there'd be cheering and shit. They'd bring them beer. I think we inspired them. It was OK to resist. It was OK to get organized. We supported them. They knew that when we said we'd do something, we did it. It was like we were still in Vietnam.

Tom Wetzler: It really was a wonderful convoy in a lot of ways. I remember I was in Flamingo Park when the main convoy came in. I had gone early to pick up a friend of mine. It looked like a scene from the liberation of Paris. You hear this rumbling in the background and people are saying, "The vets are coming!" They all ran to the fence, and coming down the street is this convoy. The convoy had met at Daytona Beach, and then from there, it was one massive convoy. I seem to remember "When Johnny Comes Marching Home" whistled somewhere. There was someone with a helmet full of joints, passing them out. It was real exciting.

AH: After we had the land set up, the Nazis goose-stepped in.

Barry Romo (BR): The Nazis grabbed the stage in the middle of Flamingo Park. I saw them getting on the stage. So I run up on the stage to fight them and they fucking knocked me and threw me off, just in time for 1,500 vets to land. [Laughs]

AH: I watched the ring of guys close in around the Nazis. Steve and Danny were on the stage. One of the Nazis made the stupid mistake of picking up a chair and hitting Steve. Danny picked up the chair and hit the Nazi. The chair exploded on the Nazi's head. They never did find the rest of the chair. He's doing some real dramatic bleeding and Danny says, "Four vets on each Nazi."

BR: We got up there and formed a cordon around them so that the demonstrators couldn't kill them. We gave them a minute to leave. They said no. We rushed them and kicked the shit out of them, drug them with their faces down on the concrete. The police stood by and laughed, because this is Miami Beach police.

AH: You have to understand, we are in South Miami Beach, where every Jewish working-class person from the entire eastern half of the northern tier of the United States retired. A bunch of them were Holocaust survivors.

At first, they were not happy with this encampment in their park, real unhappy with the counterculture, and terrified out of their sweet little old brains of anyone that looked wild. The vets looked wild and weren't the happiest crew in the world because they had to babysit for the yippies.

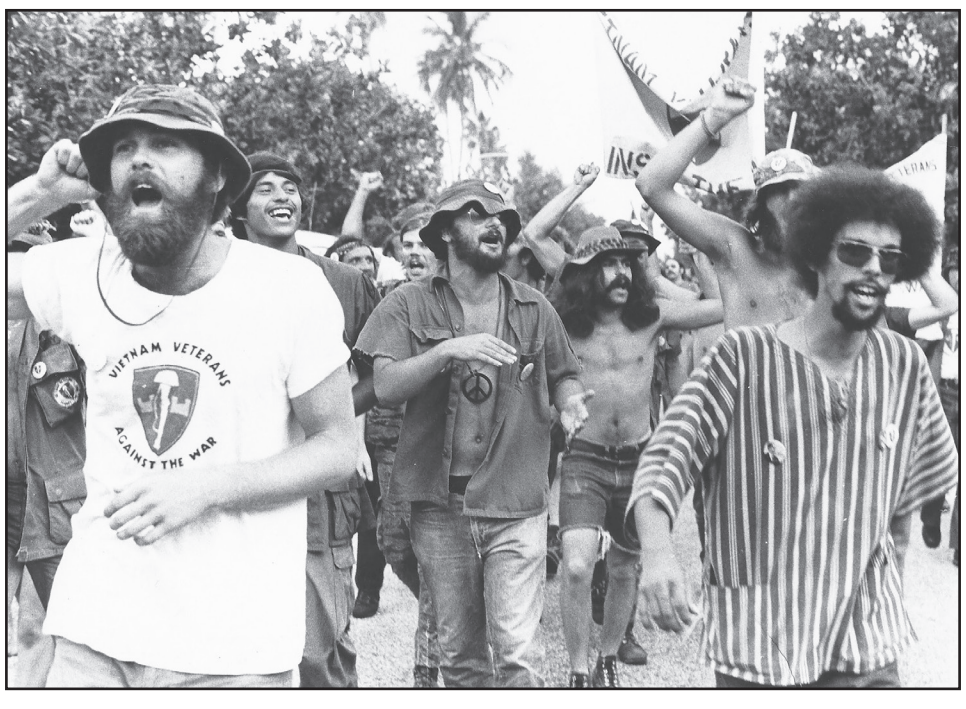
BR: After we kicked the Nazis' butts, it was hilarious, because then the Jewish women who wouldn't support us in Flamingo Park before were over there, "You need lights? We'll get lights. You need toilets? We'll get toilets. You guys kicked Nazis' ass!" Yeah, right, we're not fascists; we're anti-fascists.

AH: It was the dream of their life. This little old guy comes up to me and says, "We're very grateful." [She simulates an eastern European accent.] I said, "They're really very good boys. They really won't hurt you and they're not here to mess up the neighborhood. If we can help..." "Darlink, you've already helped more than you could realize." One of the ladies said, "What can we do for you?" Suddenly, we're drowning in chicken soup. The vets like to eat. We were up to our sweet little ears in soup.

I made the stupid mistake of mentioning that they had a passing fondness for beer. For the next two days, we almost had enough beer. They sent trucks. They were just incredibly grateful. It cemented our relationship. Nobody could hurt these vets.

BR: We're in Flamingo Park, but we're separate, because there was just too much insanity with the other groups [yippies, zippies, etc.]. People just didn't feel secure, and we're vets, and vets like to feel secure no matter where they're at. So we set up our own camp with our own security, and people couldn't walk through unless we said.

Jack McCloskey (JKC): People were trying to come in trying to sell us heroin . . . every kind of dope you can think of.



Bill Wyman, Ron Kovic, & Bobby Muller at RNC, Miami, 1972.

We had walkie-talkies. People couldn't come in unless we cleared them first, and then they had to go with someone. It was like a military base in Vietnam. We knew that we would be infiltrated by people. We also knew we wanted to separate ourselves from political crazies, no matter what organization they came from.

Sheldon Ramsdell (SR): We were kicking informants off the campground at Flamingo Park every day. The media came in, and some of them weren't media at all.

How did you know?

SR: They didn't know how to behave. They didn't know how to fit in. You just knew there was something off here. He's taking photographs and he's got a microphone and he's only turning the machine on when you're giving your name, address, and serial number—that kind of thing. Obviously, you're not there to help us in any way. Maybe you are, but we're not convinced and you really have to leave. We take a picture and two guys would escort him off. He would be very upset. It only happened two or three times, but once was enough.

Once VVAW had set up camp and had dealt with the harassment from right-wing groups intent on disrupting the proceedings, and with apparently pointless protests such as those by the Zippies (whom most members of VVAW detested), the veterans began to engage in their own series of demonstrations, which lasted three days.

SR: We marched silently from Flamingo Park to the Doral Hotel, where Nixon was. Pete McCloskey [a congressman from California] came up with bottles of Coca-Cola and handed them out; and I remember Mary McGrory wrote, "This terrorist group had bottles in their hands and no one threw a Molotov cocktail that day." [Laughs.]

On Tuesday, August 22—the second day of the convention—the veterans held what was to be its most dramatic protest. VVAW members once again marched silently, this time to the Fontainebleau Hotel, the center of the convention activities. As the journalist, Hunter S. Thompson recalled, "The silence of the march was contagious, almost threatening.... The only sounds I remember hearing were the soft thump of boot leather on hot asphalt and the occasional rattling of an open canteen top." This march, however, received no other attention from the media.

SR: I was up at the Fontainebleau Hotel with Peggy Kerry [John Kerry's sister] and Hunter Thompson and all these other types [in an exaggeratedly deep voice], listening as the march was beginning. I was going to get down there with the unit.

I went down and Rocky Pomerance, the chief of police in Miami Beach, was among the heads of the National Guard [and] Secret Service—all these military and police officials of the brass standing in a circle—and I overheard him saying, "Well, there's some people in this march throwing things and breaking windows."

I just went right over there... He already knew who I was. "This is Shelly Ramsdell, the PR dude with the Vietnam Veterans Against the War." I says, "I want to tell you this is going to be a peaceful march. There's going to be no trouble. If anyone causes trouble, isolate them—I don't care what you do. This has got to be peaceful; everything counts on this."

He was wonderful. He says, "Look, all right. Everybody get into the car." I don't know if I want to do this, but I get into the car. We get near the march, and I say, "Let me out here. [Laughs.] I don't want them to see me getting out of your car." Rocky, who was our pal, says, "Well, we'll isolate them."

I says, "What are you going to do?"

"Well, we'll pick them up. We got these U-Hauls-no windows, no ventilation—we'll stick them in there."

I said, "Oh, shit." [Laughs.]

Bobby Muller (BM): We went to the Fontainebleau Hotel, and we demanded a meeting with Nixon. We had all the VVAW people out there in the streets. We had an awful lot of people. They wouldn't let us in.

At the Fontainebleau, 500 heavily armed police officers confronted the marchers. No violent confrontation took place on that day, the veterans dispersed peacefully. However, on the next day—the day Nixon was to accept his party's renomination—they returned en masse to the convention site. Once again, they were confronted by the police.

BM: Myself, [Ron] Kovic, Bill Wyman—a double amputee—and I think a couple of other guys made it into the lobby of the hotel. We read a statement to the press. Somebody called in a bomb threat. It was just getting an excuse to get us out. So they kicked us out.

I remember we were in the front. The cops were several deep with the batons and masks. The guys like [Ed] Damato and others were saying these guys had volunteered for this duty, they wanted to crack heads, that there would be bloodshed. I said, "I'm not leaving."

Danny Friedman: The state police took over duties from the Miami Beach police because they thought the Miami police were too sympathetic.

continued on page 10

The Last Patrol: 1972

continued from page 9

They had a Democratic mayor but a Republican governor, and he ordered the state police in and they were like storm troopers.

SR: In the beginning, I guess there were a few anarchists wearing masks ... who threw the smoke bombs and then burned the police barricades. I said, "This is it," you know.

BR: Then the demonstrations happened. People would sit down in the street, and they would be arrested nonviolently. Some people would go out and trash.

VVAW has never believed in trashing. We always thought it was counterproductive. We always believed that all it is is a bunch of little children acting out their own frustration, and you can't win people over by setting fires to their stores. We made tons of mistakes but never made the mistake of thinking that setting a trash can on fire could change the world.

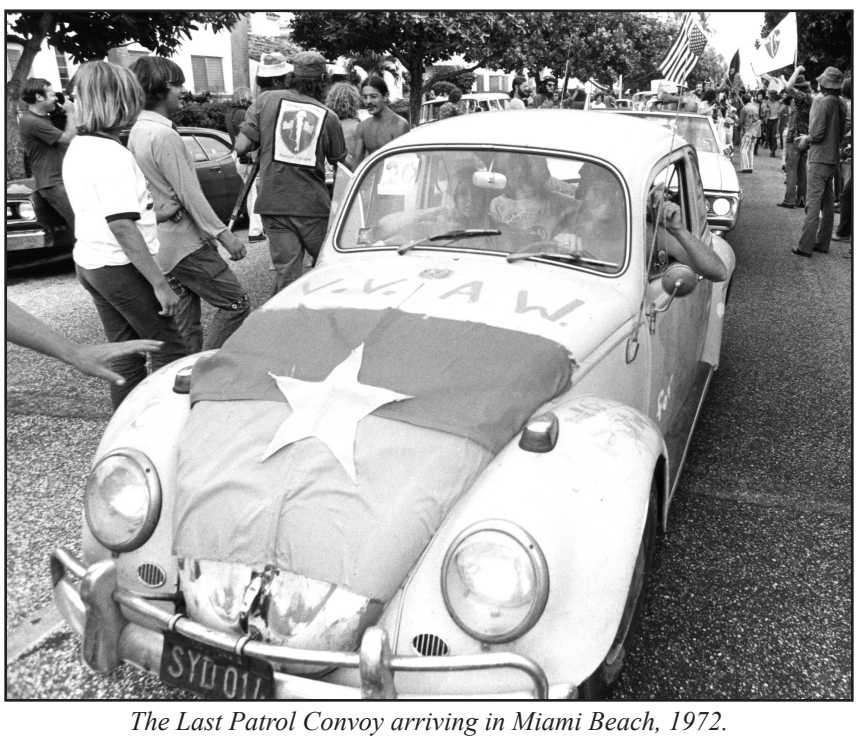
The police assaulted; it was a police riot. The police were beating people up and gassing people and everything else. We went out dragging people off the street who had been hurt real bad or who had been maced, getting them to hospitals and stuff.

Linda Alband: I was back like behind the lines and we got tear-gassed anyway. The tear-gas got lobbed in the wrong direction. I was with a bunch of senior citizens who were very severely damaged by the tear gas and choking. I thought some of them would have heart attacks. So I went to the police who, it had been advertised, would have water and stuff like that. I tried to get them to give me some so we could wash these people's faces off. They wouldn't even talk to me. They were just standing there.

JMC: I got tear-gassed . . . I was treating an old man that got tear-gassed and I remember yippies coming up, saying, "What the fuck are you doing? This guy's your enemy." I'm saying, "Hey, I'm treating this man; he's dying from the tear gas." They took my hand, put it in a car door, and slammed the car door, breaking my two fingers.

BM: At that time, Congressman McCloskey from California had aides that were there. They gave me passes to go in as a delegate because McCloskey, who had run for president, had been denied through the RNC [Republican National Committee] the ability to use the forum of the Republican Convention to make an anti-war statement. They procedurally shut him out. He was very pissed. So Wyman, myself, and some walking guy [that is, not in a wheelchair] went in as alternate delegates.

We had been gassed and all that stuff approaching the convention. It was bedlam, but we had our alternate delegate passes and we got in. Somehow, while we were inside, Kovic showed up. I don't know how Kovic got in, but he ended up joining us.

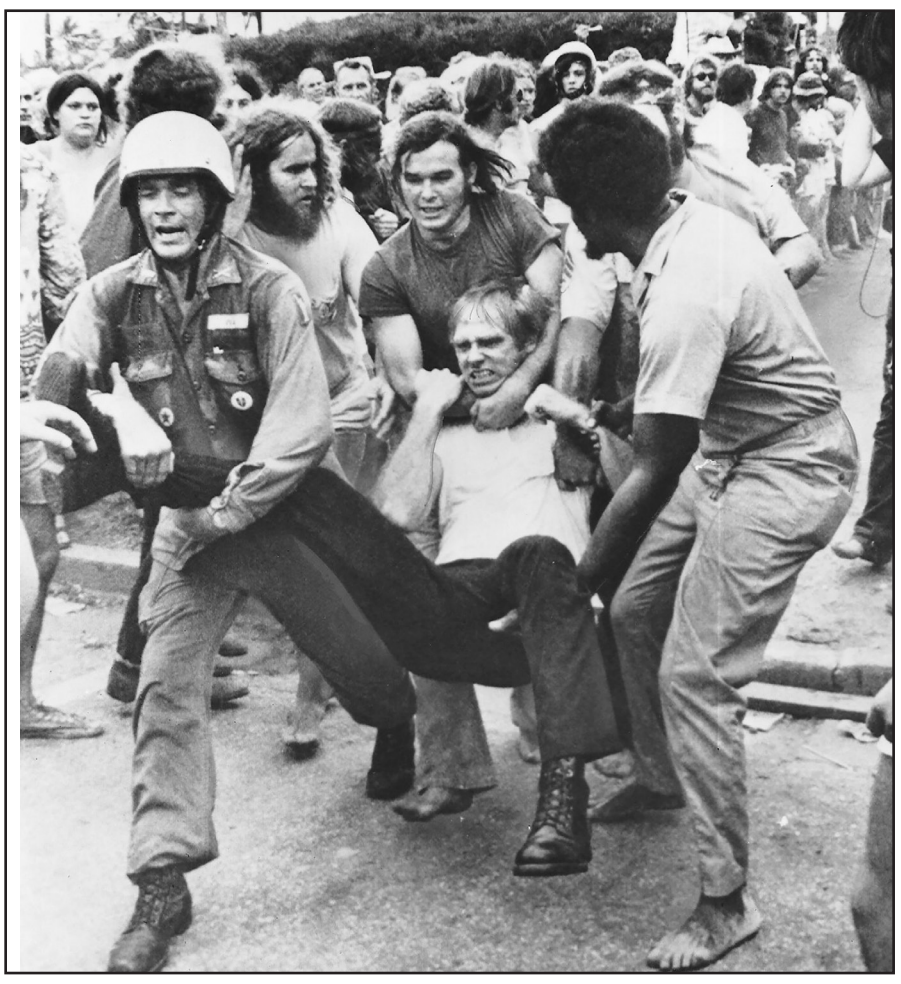


The Last Patrol Convoy arriving in Miami Beach, 1972.

We just sat there and waited for Nixon. When Nixon came on, we waited for the place to get silent and did what I consider the bravest thing that I've done, which is: took a deep breath, leaned back in the chair, and just shouted at the top of my lungs, "Stop the bombing; stop the war." Then we picked it up as a chant, "Stop the bombing; stop the war." The Secret Service was right around us, because we were dirtbags. We were wearing camouflage and stunk to high heaven. They said, "What do we do, what do we do?" While they're trying to figure out what to do, we're just steady screaming. They finally said, "Throw them out." Delegates spit on us and went a little crazy. They threw us out a back door. Thank God they shut the door, because the delegates wanted to kill us.

I remember, in traditional VVAW fashion, we reconvened at the city dump in Miami. That was the rendezvous point, the garbage dump. Can you imagine? I went to the garbage dump and said, "That's it. I'm out of here. Get me to the airport." [Laughs.]

Copies of Winter Soldiers can be purchased through Haymarket Books at www.haymarketbooks.org/books/859-winter-soldiers.



Nazi's being escorted away by VVAW, Flamingo Beach, Florida, 1972.

Miami Beach, 1972.

The Democratic Convention: 1972

AS TOLD TO RICHARD STACEWICZ

From Richard Stacewicz's Winter Soldiers p305-307

In the summer of 1972, the Democrats and Republicans held their nominating conventions in Miami, Florida. VVAW planned to attend both conventions in order to pressure the parties to bring the war to an end. Although the Republicans continued to resist VVAW, the Democrats proved to be much more amenable to its demands. For one thing, by that time the Democratic Party had become much more inclusive, having broadened its base among anti-war liberals as well as among African-Americans and other groups that had once been kept on its periphery. Also, of course, the Democrats were now the opposition party, trying to regain the presidency. The Vietnam war had definitely become a liability for the Nixon administration, which had been promising to end it since 1968, and the Democrats now hoped that VVAW, with its perceived legitimacy, could help them win.

Ann Hirschman: We got invited to the Democratic convention. The Democratic Party at that point was making overtures that indicated that they wanted to be progressive. There was a clear perception that some of the Democrats, particularly the black caucus, seemed to have a very clear notion that the Democrats were not looking good on defense, and that perhaps working with a progressive veterans' group would shine them up.

We went in, and the first thing they did was search everybody but me. I was carrying the first aid pack, and it was forty-nine vets and me. Ron Dellums came over with Barry's birthday present from home. Some California delegate brought us pizza and Kentucky Fried Chicken. We watched the convention. People were taking us seriously. It was hot shit.

Danny Friedman: The bottom line was that we were the honored guests of the Democrats. We were treated like royalty everywhere we went. We were applauded. We were welcomed onto the floor of the convention. Jim Bouton, who was a former pitcher of the Yankees and a delegate from New Jersey, sent us up a whole ton of fried chicken.

Barry Romo (BR): We had four organizations: there was National Tenants Rights Organization, the Welfare Rights Organization with Beulah Sanders, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference with Ralph Abernathy, and VVAW. The four of us formed a leadership to put pressure on the Democratic convention to demand an anti-racist platform with social justice. I was on the executive committee. I had a floor pass. I was allowed to go anywhere I fucking wanted.

There was a zillion good people there because they had beat fucking Daley, they had sat the black delegates, they nominated McGovern, they came out against the goddamned war. They put in a thing before the convention to pass a resolution in defense of the Vietnam Vets Against the War being attacked by the Nixon administration. The whole convention passed it. We won a lot.

Annie Bailey: We didn't lose a lot of people in those early days—we just kept getting more and more—but we had an exodus of vets who were working on the presidential campaign. Vets for McGovern. They really wanted us to take on Vets for McGovern as a national thing, but we wouldn't do it. That was something that we couldn't abide. We don't endorse candidates: democracy, yes; but candidates, no.

Bill Davis: I'd made one of the appearances [at a McGovern rally], and it just nauseated me. We had to take off our VVAW shit. It was like a wave of liberals left. Some went to work for McGovern.

BR: We didn't realize the allies and the depth of organizing that we could have expanded on with the people that were there. [We] didn't understand what we should have done in terms of networking with them, working from the base of that convention. It wasn't a question of rejecting it; it was a question of just ignorance. We were just too young. I'm a twenty-five-year-old national coordinator running around with Ralph Abernathy, not a graduate of a goddamned college, and only been out of the service four years.

We only had a small demonstration there, maybe 50 to 75 VVAW members. Everything was going for the confrontational one, which was with Nixon, what we called the Last Patrol with three car caravans going to the thing; 1,500 to 2,000 VVAW members.

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VVAW marching at the Democratic National Convention, Miami, 1972.

The Man in the Uniform

I saw a man, in a uniform
worn like skin, molded
trim and significant
with colored patches,
bits of brass, chevrons, bars
an accounting, I thought,
of courage and skill,
a story of to hell and back
silently spoken
into my cradle of uncertainty
bending me like a green stick
toward the siren song of
Duty, Honor, Country;
talismanic words
irrefutable
immutable
the common shield
behind which I marched
with others
into the mystery of war.

I am a man
without a uniform
without significance
without a shield
naked
and all too aware
of what I might have been:
A spirit lost
drained away
into the pores of the earth;

A spirit shattered
all there
but re-assembled badly;

A spirit draped
in the crimson robe of shame
endlessly asking, "How could I have?"

A spirit swollen, diseased,
infected by Colt, Browning and Boeing,
with the awesome power of death;

A spirit offended
looking for someone to blame;

Or, as it was,
a spirit confused,
wearing out of date clothes
looking for shelter
in a job, a family, a bottle
or just a space where I need not think.

—Woody Powell

The Light at the Tip of the Candle

Michael Orange

I believe there is a sacred covenant between a society and its soldiers. Soldiers do their part by being willing to serve, to fight, and perhaps to die, and society has an obligation to honor that sacrifice.

We soldiers carried more than just our weapons into combat. We also carried the political baggage of our war. Those who fought in the so-called "Good War" (i.e., WWII), carried the respect of their country and the approval of history. But if your turn comes up for a bad war, or a war fought for selfish or stupid reasons, then you carry that on your back.

I went to war when I was a little over twenty—not a child, but not yet an adult. When I arrived at the Cleveland airport after my tour of duty in Vietnam, I just sat down paralyzed with befuddled emotions. I didn't even call my parents to tell them I was home. I was afraid my family would expect to see the person I was, and not accept the person I had become; that they would not forgive me for what I had done and not done in Vietnam. How could they, when I couldn't forgive myself?

Like some toxic virus morphing in a Petri dish, the war infected my moral DNA. I came home no longer thinking with the same mind, seeing with the same eyes, hearing with the same ears. The Marines had trained me in the belief that I could kill people because they were the enemy that would try to kill me. The rounds I fired did kill people in Vietnam, including some who had tried to kill me. But I know that most casualties were civilians, caught in the carnage that is war. Sitting in that airport terminal, I was neither able to judge my actions and inactions, nor to fully grasp the transformation I had undergone.

I found it hard to describe the differences between life in a war zone and life back in "The World," as we soldiers referred to it. In combat, emotions become so extreme they create their polar opposites. Terror sparked adrenalized excitement. Panic birthed the resolution required to control it. I remember the unrelenting chaos of a firefight when I hugged the ground as if the safety of burrowing into it could avoid being buried in it—and finally screaming into the cacophony, "I want it to stop! I want it to stop!"

In Vietnam we had a mantra—It don't mean nothin.' It was a necessary, all-purpose lie we used as a bandage to keep our consciences from bleeding out, and as a mask to hide our faces from ourselves, from each other, and from our role as aggressors. We got so good at telling this lie that we kept telling it even after we came home to a nation that didn't want to hear our stories.

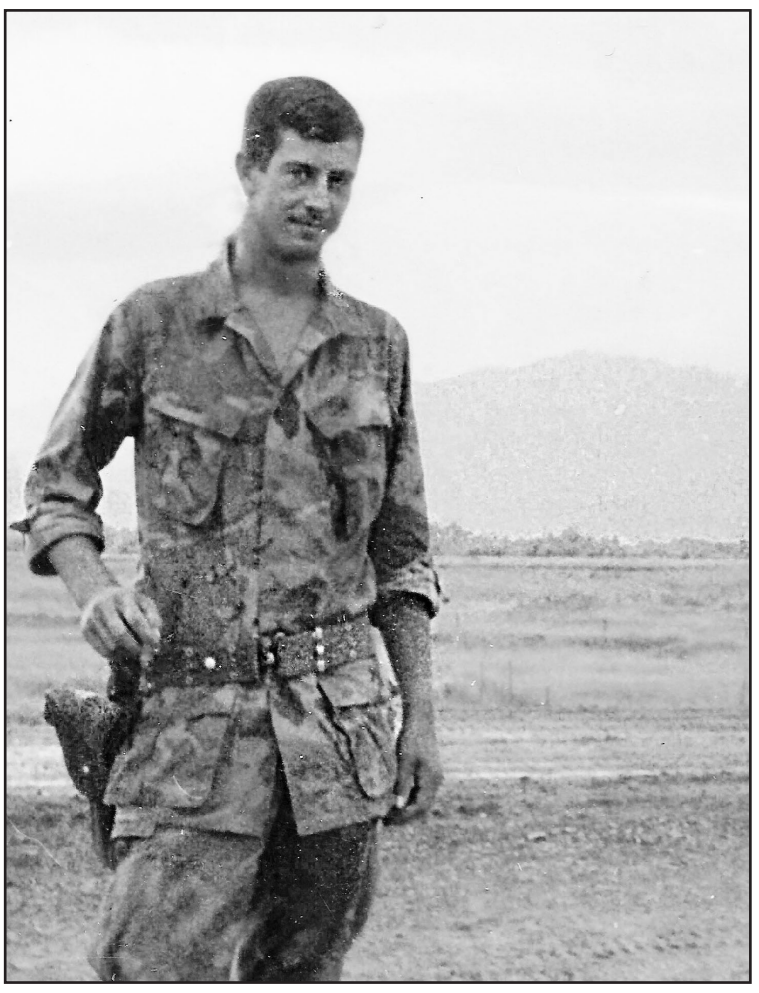
Vietnam gave me the opportunity to explore the very best in me and to face the very worst. Bootcamp was designed to swap out civilian ethics with the militaristic replacements needed to deal with the barbarism that is war. But when discharged, there was no Bootcamp to reverse-engineer the process.

When I came home, I was unaware that I was suffering from what would come to be known as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, even though it formed the fault line of my personality change. I repressed the war and my experiences. It don't mean nothin.'

I went back to college that fall of 1970 and tried to fit back into my former cocoon. I had to restrain my urge to revolt at the triviality of my classmates' concerns while I still had friends rotting back in the jungle. It strained my nerves until I thought they would fry from too much voltage. Instead of screaming, I just went along like a foreigner pretending to understand the conversation.

In Vietnam, I heard stories about anti-war protesters, and I knew my college friends thought the war was immoral. I gave this some weight, but I had more important matters to attend to, like checking for a tripwire one pace ahead and straining bomb crater water through my teeth.

I needed a moral handhold there, illusory though it was, that we were doing something important, honorable, and necessary as I hung over the cliff of the war's dark insanity. After coming home and returning to college, I lost my voice on the highly politicized Kent State University campus. I had no railroad tracks to press my ear to—to sense what was steaming my way. Fearful of the stigma society laid on us Vietnam vets, I became a closet vet. I knew my handholds were slipping.



Michael Orange in Vietnam.

Thirty-three years later, I started PTSD therapy. With the lifesaving, non-judgmental love and wisdom from Cynthia, my wife of now almost 49 years, I finally cracked my psychic shell and, like a little chick, I began to peck my way out into a new world, a world full of potential.

People in recovery might use the term grateful alcoholic to describe how their past—no matter how difficult, shameful, or crazy—shaped their character in positive ways. I feel that way since completing my PTSD therapy. I'm a grateful, recovering veteran. The lessons from Vietnam forged a greater appreciation for the preciousness of life, and the importance of compassion and love both for myself and for my incredible community of family and friends. They enrich my life.

A Buddhist monk who died recently, Thich Nhat Hanh, spoke to this kind of life-saving transformation at a five-day retreat I attended with him in 2003. He said:

"Veterans are the light at the tip of the candle, illuminating the way for the whole nation. If veterans can achieve awareness, transformation, understanding, and peace, they can share with the rest of society the realities of war. And they can teach us how to make peace with ourselves and each other, so we never have to use violence to resolve conflicts again."

Thich Nhat Hanh describes us war veterans as "the light at the tip of the candle," but only if we can "achieve awareness, transformation, understanding, and peace." We vets can use our service experiences to become lights at the tip of our own candles so we can transform our lives and help heal our conflict-ridden world.

Michael Orange's book, Fire in the Hole: A Mortarman in Vietnam (2001), described his wartime experiences as a Marine. His new book, Embracing the Ghosts: PTSD and the Vietnam Quagmire (2021), describes the lessons he gleaned from the PTSD therapy he completed three decades after coming home.

Michael Orange has been a member of VVAW since he joined at the group's Dewey Canyon III protest in Washington DC in 1971.

Sgt. Johnston 52 Years Later

Bill Johnston

Taipei Air Station—April 1969.

Just on the edge of downtown Taipei, Taiwan (Republic of China) next to Taiwan National University and surrounded by houses, small businesses, schools and behind us was the university's experimental rice paddy. The path around it was our jogging trail. Best of all it was a friendly neighborhood and the 120 Airmen of the 327th Air Division no doubt provided an intriguing diversion for the Chinese around us. Especially the Children who found my friend Wayne's hairy arms and big nose a source of never ending entertainment on their walk home from school. Wayne was an AP and usually in the guard shack at the front gate as the crowd of uniformed kids surrounded him feeling his arms, wanting to touch his nose and mustache or—watch out!—feel his blue eyes. It was a great duty station and we were not in Vietnam!

It was warm and a beautiful evening as three of us walked out of the Air Station front gate and down Roosevelt Road teaming with people and traffic. We did what few young people do—pondered our futures as "old veterans"—"think of those pictures we see of Civil War Veterans with their long beards and canes." Frank was from Michigan—Jim from Texas and while Washington State had no involvement in the Civil War as their states had I was the great grandson of two Union Army troopers. I was brought up very much aware of their service. Today my great grandfather's cavalry saber he carried in the Battle of Nashville hangs on the wall of my den at home.

None of us supported the war we had been called on to participate in but our choices were few. We believed joining the Air Force had been a good one. But how would we be remembered?

We pondered how we would be remembered. We had all joined the Air Force just ahead of the draft dragging us into the army and probably Vietnam. None of us supported the war we had been called on to participate in but our choices were few. We believed joining the Air Force had been a good one. But how would we be remembered? Like World War II Veterans? Veterans of "the good war." Admired as men and women who destroyed an evil in the world and saved democracy. One could hardly claim we were serving in such a cause. We didn't think so and at the time we were stationed in an undemocratic dictatorship with soldiers posted on almost every corner. A government of Chinese ruling over the Taiwanese who have a long history of independence from the mainland. What the hell were we doing there?

Looking back now I can hope the US had a somewhat stabilizing influence and helped create the dynamic open democratic country that Taiwan has become with Taiwanese elected leadership. Something to keep in my mind when wearing my "USAF Veteran" hat and I get a "thank you for your service" from someone in a store or out in the public. I always say "thank you but the army made me do it ." Maybe they get it and maybe not. What I do not like is the general referral to veterans as "heroes." No. In 1966 when you got your draft notice (unlike the draft dodger tRump) it was your citizens obligation to go "do your duty." We had a citizen military not a professional army like we have now. To us it was not our "job." Serve your time and go home!

I think the "hero" thing is a guilt trip left over from sending 58,000 of our generation off to get killed for nothing. Now here we are a bunch of old guys and it is hard to think about us running around the jungles shooting and getting shot at—maybe killed. Too many of us became cynics from that experience. The youngest of Vietnam Veterans are at least 65 years old, an age group that has the lowest opinion of the government's ability to solve problems. Unfortunately a majority of them voted for a political party and candidate who stands for nothing. We took care of each other as Airmen, Soldiers and Sailors and to not care about one another now is not heroic at all! Peace!

Bill Johnston was a Legal Specialist in the Office of the Staff Judge Advocate assigned to Taipei Air Station Taiwan (ROC) - 1968-69.

Maggot Days:Here Comes the Sun

Gerald R. Gioglio

"My humanity is bound up in yours, for we can only be human together." —Desmond Tutu

Somehow, a handful of us secured passes for the same weekend. So, one early spring day in 1969 four of us jumped into my car and headed toward the Pacific Ocean. Trust me when I say this group of in-service Conscientious Objectors was more than willing to violate travel limits to get to a beach.

In the eyes of the Army—well, some officers at least—we were considered a motley bunch. Still "maggots," all casually non-strac with numerous Article 15s to prove it, and worse, for refusing to participate in the madness that was the war in Southeast Asia.

All of us were quietly anxious over how our claims for discharge as Conscientious Objectors would be adjudicated. Any of us might be given an honorable discharge, renewed orders to Vietnam, or prison for refusing to ship. Some of us were also stressed by the pressure of low-level undercover resistance. Publicly or privately, we all spoke with or counseled other disillusioned GIs; we all attended the local GI Coffeehouse which was under surveillance. One of us recently refused weapons training; two of us accepted an order to guard a hospitalized prisoner but refused to carry weapons during the assignment. Along with the ten or so other Conscientious Objectors left behind at our Garrison Company, we all attended periodic peace rallies in Seattle. So, the four of us were glad to get away from it all, abandoning Fort Lewis, Washington for the promise of sandy beaches in Seaside, Oregon.

The white and yellow lines stretched on across Washington as the AM radio blasted familiar psychedelic grooves and rock and roll—Grace Slick and Jefferson Airplane screamed "Feed your head!" Buffalo Springfield warned, "Everybody look what's going down." The Cream sang of feelin' free and bein' so glad; all intermixed with a generous serving of The Rolling Stones and wildly popular Beatles songs.

Traveling through a mountainous area was something novel for me, a kid from the urban parts of the New York Metropolitan area. Infantry-trained to be hyper-alert, my eyes darted front and back, left and right and I scanned it all, even if I did not realize what I was doing. Somehow, however, I entered into the minute and allowed myself to focus as the brilliant morning sun painted the mountains' spectacular hues of coffee, cinnamon, and tan. My spirits were also lifted by the jovial chatter of my companions. Then, magically it seemed, it happened. The DJ spun "Here Comes the Sun" by the Beatles. Just another rock song, right? Not this time. It was just what I—we— needed to hear, really hear.

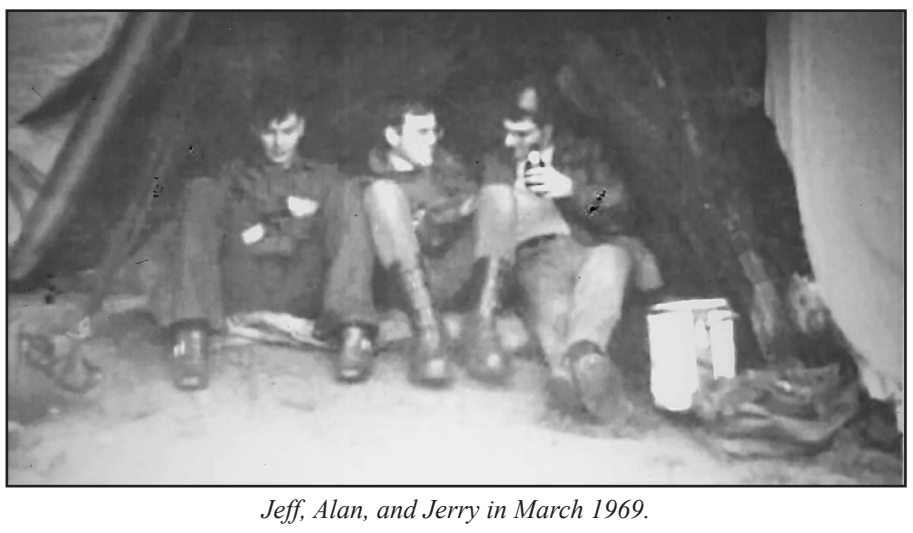
"Little darling, it's been a long cold lonely winter…

Little darling, the smile's returning to the faces…

… it seems like years since it's been here."

Looking across at my wife at the time and into the rearview mirror I could see it was true. Relief. Smiles. Laughter, simple human joy. Oh yes, there was important personal and communal resistance and activism to be done—and soon enough—prison time for a couple of us; but today, this day, we were free.

Soon enough, we drove through seemingly endless Oregon State Forests—cruising through oceans of pine trees in every direction. Eventually, we arrived in Seaside and by happenstance ended up driving on a street called "The Loop." The locals claimed this was the end of the Western trail traveled by the Lewis and Clark Expedition in 1805. Driving through, we passed quaint mom and pop shops, all with storefronts on the ground level and apartments above. We soon



Jeff, Alan, and Jerry in March 1969.

reached a turnaround taking us back through town. At one point we parked to scope the area and get supplies to cook on the beach.

One of the shops had a sign hanging on the front door, "No shirt, No shoes, No hippies!" We looked at each other and laughed hysterically. Here we were, children of the counterculture each with some level of involvement, all now with short hair and by default incognito. We decided this was the place to shop, figuring if we could stop laughing and behave, we could pass. Somehow, showing great restraint, we did.

Fully supplied—perhaps oversupplied with six-packs of Washington State's Rainier beer—we planned to stay for a day and a half with a friend of one of our crew. Even though we were outside the travel zone, we knew as long as we stayed out of trouble and got back to the base on time, we would be okay. So, we dropped off some supplies at the beach house and headed toward the ocean, six-packs of beer and transistor radio in tow.

I found this picture of the crew some 40-odd years later. It was cool and breezy on the beach so we built a lean-to with a shelter half and driftwood. Trying to keep warm, all of us were stylin' our scuffed, black boots topped by an eclectic mix of civilian and olive drab duds. Hell man, it was all we had.

Eventually, we gathered around a campfire fueled by kindling and driftwood. We drank beers and cooked husked corn and chicken, just enjoying the cool, salty beach air and the intermittent sunshine. We sat and laughed in communion; all of us on borrowed time. All in solidarity, having left our worries behind. Just spending time being the 19 & 20-year-old kids that we were. It was glorious.

We didn't know what was in store for us. After all, we were up against the full force and power of the US military. But for today, this weekend, we were on R n' R, baby. And every time the sun broke through the clouds that Beatles song bounced around in my brain:

"Here comes the sun…

Here comes the sun, and I speak…

It's all right."

Somehow, those words made me feel no matter what happened to us—discharge, courts-martial, or prison—there was work to be done, and yeah, it would be okay.

Gerald Gioglio is a VVAW member, Secular Franciscan, and author of Marching to a Silent Tune: A Journey from We Shall! to Hell No!" published July 2022 by ACTA Publications.

Years of a Life: Lessons Learned and Unlearned

Joe Miller (reviewer)

Lieutenant Dangerous: A Vietnam War Memoir
by Jeff Danziger
(Steerforth Press, 2021)

How many have appreciated the cartoons of Jeff Danziger in *The Veteran* over the years and wondered: Who is this guy? Now you have a chance to find out with this entertaining, disturbing, and ultimately satisfying memoir.

This book is filled with potential quotations in a review like this (my copy is underlined in many spots throughout), but I will try to limit myself. Here is one that provides the essence of Danziger's story, in my view:

"On the plane [to Vietnam], after it was clearly too late to do anything about anything, I was almost impressed at how little I understood of what I was doing. I was not depressed. My ignorance of my situation, at least of the reason for my situation, was almost like some sort of ether… If there was a common emotion among the soldiers it was one of failure. Somehow, we had been stupid enough to get caught in this trap. We were in an unfolding misfortune that we should have done something about years ago." (p. 70)

This was in 1970, three years after Danziger had been drafted as a married college graduate. He had spent these years trying to find some way to meet his military obligation while staying out of the fighting war. You may ask: why was he still in the Army if he had been drafted in 1967? Well, after putting in for intelligence duties, getting sent to language school for Vietnamese (this story is worth a book in itself), he decides to try for an officer's commission, then ordnance officer training. Now, instead of a discharge in 1969, he must wait until 1971.

At each step in this long and winding effort to put off being sent to war, events conspire to result in his eventual orders for Vietnam with fourteen months left to serve. So, the last fourteen chapters of the book take place in Vietnam, and, eventually to Laos in Operation Lam Son. Danziger is detailed in every event, every effort to really understand his (and others') circumstances. His sensitivity to the struggles of everyone to survive and get back home, his internal battles with choices to be made, external battles with the stupidity of officers above him, his awareness of the real political and economic issues of the war. These are expressed in clear prose, almost as if he were drawing a political cartoon.

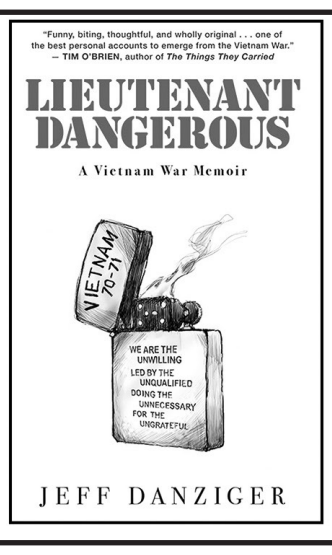
He does not pretend to be a hero, or even a heroic victim. He tries to explain (to the reader and to himself) what convictions led him to each decision. He is clear about his conservative values. He struggles with them. He takes the reader through a history of US involvement in Vietnam, especially during the Nixon years.

The Catch-22 elements of Danziger's story are entertaining and informative. Anyone who ever served in ANY branch of the military will nod and smile in recognition. I had to chuckle at the story of his Vietnamese language training. He thought he would be sent to the cushy surroundings of Monterey, California. In earlier years, that might have been the case. When I was stationed in Monterey for Chinese in 1961-63, they were just beginning the Vietnamese program. Unfortunately, by 1967, more troops were being sent to the dry, dusty climes of Texas.

One final, niggling point. On the very last page, Danziger recounts the story of Mao being asked by reporters what he thought of the French Revolution. In fact, it was Zhou Enlai, the Premier of China, who was asked this question. He replied, "It is too early to tell." Danziger's response to this story is "if that doesn't scare the hell out of you, nothing will," assuming that Zhou was talking about the 1789 revolution. In fact, many in the China field believe that Zhou (and the reporter) were talking about the French Revolution then on-going in the streets of Paris in 1968. Of course, that was still scary for many conservatives.

Read Jeff Danziger's book. You will not be disappointed.

Joe Miller is a board member of Vietnam Veterans Against the War.


"Funny, biting, thoughtful, and wholly original . . . one of the best personal accounts to emerge from the Vietnam War."
— TIM O'BRIEN, author of The Things They Carried
LIEUTENANT DANGEROUS
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STEERFORTH PRESS

Entering War, Coming Home

Joe Petzel

Most Army soldiers came to and from Vietnam aboard a 707 commercial airliner. Two years ago, I was seated next to a retired flight attendant. Somehow we started a conversation about Vietnam. She told me she was a stewardess who flew the flights bringing soldiers to and from Vietnam. I told her how, as we flew to and from the war, the stewardesses looked like angels, especially on the way home after my tour. She told me about the heartbreak she felt flying, "…. so many boys to Vietnam…. how young they were…. how depressing the flights to Vietnam were. It was a different experience flying them home." I thanked her for doing this act of mercy. How many young men looked at her on their trip to Vietnam and wondered about their girlfriends, wondered if they would make it back for the return flight home. I wondered if she might have been on one of my flights to and from. Our conversation seemed good for both of us, somehow a bit of healing from that tragic time.

My flight to Vietnam originated at Travis Air Force Base, north of San Francisco. New soldiers traveled alone and were assigned to a unit on arrival "in country." I didn't know anyone on the flight. The flight was mostly quiet, very somber for a group of 19 to 21 year olds. Fear and apprehension were thick in the plane. Most of us had no idea what awaited us or what our assignments would be. I had been trained as a morse code operator but morse code was not used in Vietnam, so my assignment was completely unknown. The flight seemed to crawl through the air, as if the depressed, fearful, dense interior was a drag on our jet airliner.

We landed at Tan Son Nhat Air Force Base, South Vietnam. As we disembarked from the plane, the stewardess wished us good luck at the door. My first awareness as I stepped out the door was the overpowering heat and humidity. Our plane was next to a thick, barbed wire fence. Behind that fence a dense, beautiful, foreboding jungle stretched as far as I could see. I had grown up in Chicago and thought I was accustomed to humidity. I didn't know about tropical humidity. No one mentioned it in boot camp training. No one mentioned the terrain which was unlike anything any of us lived in yet alone fought in. It felt like I had to force my way into that heavy, wet, dense air; that it was pushing me back into the plane.

As I reached the bottom of the movable stairway and beyond, away from the burning jet fuel smell, the thick, sweet, rotting smell of the jungle seemed to coat the inside of my nose. It was frightening to smell. It had the secrets of life, death and decay in its hidden, thick, brown, green web. It looked alien on the other side of the well secured fence. The rotted, sweet smell reaching me, letting my nose, mouth and lungs know any fence couldn't protect me from the future year I had to serve in country,

As I was sensing this new, unknown foreign information, I began to hear the jeers and verbal assaults from some of the soldiers lined up. They were going to enter the plane for their flight home. Their tours of duty, one year for most of us, were up and they were going back to "the world." Vietnam wasn't the world and we were totally unprepared for it with our safe American memories.

The soldiers waiting to board looked many years older than we did. Their uniforms were faded. You couldn't miss the joy that surrounded them. There were many mustaches, their hair a bit longer than ours. They were loose. We were tight. Most just looked at us or looked away but some seemed to delight in yelling, "You're gonna die."

"You just stepped into a world of shit."

"Charlie gonna blow you away," and other cruel taunts.

There was a deep presence about them. They knew something we didn't. Their year "in country" had taught them something that only war could. I couldn't imagine speaking to any of them. They were in a different world. I felt young, weak, caught in a web of feelings I can't even describe. They all seemed to float in the heat, humidity and smell. We were crawling on our feet through the oppressive onslaught. In one year, if lucky, I would be in their shoes. I couldn't imagine being there in a year that was eternity to a 20 year old.

I did survive that year physically unwounded, when it was my turn to go back to "the world." My wounding was below the physical and would weave through my future like a knot that seemed to untie and tie, untie and tie. To this day, I rarely have a day with no memories from that year. Some are pleasant, some bring grief, anger, and thank God, no more rage. The worst feelings come and really can't be described. They aren't the normal anger, sadness, fear, etc. They are dense states in which a complicated, sense of foreboding, aloneness and despair take hold.

Upon arrival to my unit, the 3rd of the 5th Armored Cavalry, 9th Infantry Division, I was assigned the job of messenger. The previous messenger had been killed, driving over a mine in the road. Later I was reassigned as rear gummer on an armored personnel carrier, a 50 caliber machine gun attached to my hands.

This story is about the beginning and the end. The middle of my tour is for other stories; tragic, sweet, maddening, insane, fun, boring, intense, untellable. I could go on with descriptions for pages. But one area I have to bring up because it's the most important reality of that war: I can never forget the cruelties to the Vietnamese people, their land, the jungles, forests, rivers and other living creatures of that beautiful country. And of course the death and injuries to my friends, as well as all soldiers.

My tour was near its end. I spent my tour in "the field," far from the large American bases that had bars, movie theaters and bowling alleys. We didn't have it as bad as the grunts did. They spent their time on their feet, walking through danger. I had the luxury of riding through danger on a metal tracked vehicle with three 50 caliber machine guns perched atop this loud, earth churning machine that could spray death.

I was very short. Actually I'm 6 foot 5, very tall. Short was a term that meant you had very few days left on your time "in country." Most soldiers' tours were for 1 year, unless you were zapped or seriously wounded. I had a week left. Barry said to me, "You're so short you're a midget." There were numerous phrases that got repeated millions of times by American soldiers in Vietnam. That was one of them. He said this with envy and joy. He was truly happy I was going back to the world and at the same time, I believe, this reminded him of the 4 months he had remaining. He said this to me with a stoned twinkle in his eyes. Whenever possible, Barry, Rusty, Davis and other close friends shared joints. We, along with the many other soldiers who smoked pot, were known as "Heads." The lifers, regular Army, left us alone. We were breaking Army rules smoking pot, but what were they going to do? There were so many of us and we all carried automatic weapons. Most of us Heads, knew the truth of our situation, that we were pawns in another's cruel, insane endeavor. I believe marijuana was a true medicine for most of us, a pleasant interruption, between friends, in that stressful, deadly time.

One week to go. One week and with a bit of luck I would be on the freedom bird, flying home to cheeseburgers, girls, long hair, freedom. I carried, in my wallet, a tattered, torn piece of paper that had 365 boxes on it. Every once in a while I would check off the number of days that had passed since the last time I did this, 358 checkmarks in an assortment of pencil checks, blue and red ink checks. There were dirt stains from all over Northern South Vietnam on it. This had been my touchstone. There were times I got to check off three weeks worth of boxes. What a thrill that was, to see the big block of time served and the lessening of time left.

My platoon, "the Bird Dogs", had set camp in a relatively safe area. There was a chow hall, outhouses, we called them shitters, and believe it or not, hot showers. In other words, heaven. Seven days to go and I got to eat hot chow every meal, sleep on a cot and luxuriate under a hot shower. I was short, safe, stoned and secure.

Exactly what I didn't want to hear I heard. We were being ordered to "Mount up", which was another way of ordering me to climb up onto our armored personnel carrier, position myself behind my 50 caliber machine gun, make sure everything was secured around me as when we moved, anything not secured might rattle off and be lost. We were the modern equivalent of the cavalry, instead of horses we rode on armored vehicles. "Mount up", "Move out" and other remnants of horse cavalry language would be shouted over the radio.

I was so short and we were being ordered up to the DMZ, a ride of about 20 miles. The DMZ was a most dangerous place. The North Vietnamese Army "owned" that area. We were to assist an infantry unit having a hard time. I was having a very hard time. I was going home in 7 days and the DMZ was so far from my home. Sergeant Kinsky, my track commander and the leader of my platoon, the Bird Dogs, was in front of me, behind his 50 caliber machine gun with the rounded metal shield that protected him. He, his gun and shield could rotate giving him a wide killing range. Me and my fellow gunner at the rear of the vehicle each had a 2 foot by 2 foot, scrawny shield that only offered you protection if you stood down into the track, below the top surface, a dangerous place to stand because if an armored piercing rocket propelled grenade penetrated the vehicle, your midsection and legs were gone.

If things got bad up at the DMZ, I might miss the day I was scheduled to leave my unit to travel south to muster out of Vietnam. Things might get delayed in more ways than one. I expected to hear the rumble of the engine starting and the smell of the diesel fuel smoke coming out the small stack behind me. Quiet. Sergeant Kinsky took off his helmet which was tied into the radio and the driver up front of him. He yelled back to us rear gunners, "Somethings fucked up." The vehicle wouldn't start. This was definitely not fucked up in my world. After checking a few things out, he jumped off of our vehicle and climbed on another, on its way to the DMZ He was a lifer and like many lifers wanted the rewards of battle; rank, medals and the prestige that being in combat brought to a soldier who made a career out of the Army. All that was my past, I hoped. I saw no prestige in the shit storm we were in.

Our track had an electrical problem. I and the 2 remaining members of our track stayed in the perimeter that had been our temporary base of operations, our temporary home. Not a totally safe place, but compared to the DMZ, A SAFE PLACE. Unless they put me on another track, I would spend my remaining days in relative safety. Our perimeter had not been tested by Charlie in the few days I had been there.

I'll never know if it was luck or one of the other guys shorted some electrical part out. By that time, in the war, there was a clear division between the lifers and the draftees. There were fraggings, a few refusals to enter into danger and open hostility, at times, between the two groups. My good friend Rusty, angered at a risky order by Sergeant Kinsky, challenged him to a fist fight. Kinsky, looked around, seeing there were no officers nearby, engaged Rusty. It ended up a draw. Most of us distrusted Kinsky. He had made bad decisions.

The next day I was given my orders. I was to fly on a chopper from our perimeter to Da Nang Marine Corps Base on that very day. From there take a plane to Tan Son Nhut Air Force Base to muster out of Vietnam. This was the single most enjoyable bit of reading I have ever done.

A friend named Baker drove me, in a jeep, to the chopper pad. We had become very close in the three months he had been in country. He wished me well and started to cry as we said goodbye. I'm sure his tears were sadness at my departure and grief over his remaining nine months in the field. I was overjoyed at leaving but tried not to show him that. There was always a cruelty in knowing someone who was close to being injured and choppered away not seeing them again or someone dying or going home. You had to stay, you had to endure and always your date of freedom seemed so far away. I learned a few months later that Baker became addicted to heroin soon after I left. A week after I left, the heroin epidemic began. It was unavailable while I was there. The Pentagon, in a report, two years later, estimated there were over 200,000 soldiers in Vietnam, addicted to heroin.

I spent the last 4 days of my Vietnam tour "mustering out", which included handing in my M16, being checked for venereal diseases, getting drunk in the enlisted men's club, buying gifts for my family; some saw prostitutes. I swam and generally basked in the good fortune of being able to leave. I have never experienced such a liberating sense. I was going home and would be discharged from the Army! No more being told what to do by so many men whom I didn't trust to know how to lead. Freedom!

While in the office of the 9th Infantry Division, I learned that Sergeant Kinsky had been wounded, a bullet to his belly, a very serious wound. The DMZ was dangerous. What kind of a war is it when your platoon sergeant is wounded and you cheer inside? I am not proud of that. I held a grudge against him that would last for many years. It's interesting that as I learned to forgive myself regarding the shame I carried from that war, my grudge toward him has disappeared. If I ran into him I would be happy to see him, knowing he made it out with his life.

The night before my flight home I went to the Enlisted Men's Club for a celebration with another soldier who was also leaving. The whiskey and ginger ale tasted so good. We got pretty toasted, putting quite a few quarters in the jukebox. At one point, the song, "We Gotta Get Out of this Place" by the Animals blasted through the club. It seemed like every voice in

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50 Years Since 1972: Reflections Back to '68 & Then to War's End!

Ron Bunnell

As an airman and jet engine mechanic in the USAF, Strategic Air Command (SAC), it was all about regular maintenance and "Keep'n the BUFFs Flying." My fellow engine mechanics and I were focused on keeping all eight of those Pratt & Whitney J57-19 jet engines fully functional on every B-52 Bomber flying and dropping bombs—lots of bombs—during Rolling Thunder between March 1965 and November 1968. By then I was out of the war, so let me review and help develop the theme "50 Years Since 1972."

By 1972, I was completing my degree in Education at the University of Northern Colorado. My wife and I had already decided to pack it all in and move to Alaska in March of '72. The Alaska Pipeline might need help. There also might be work for a worldly experienced Social Studies Teacher and Coach! The GI Bill had made it possible to get to this point.

The summer before in 1971, I had landed a summer job through one of my College Advisors. I flew to Washington DC and became a Federal Intern with the State Department. For the summer, I lived on F Street, at what is now called the Hive, near the State Dept. Daily I rode on the bus to/from Arlington, VA. just across the Potomac River.

Some evenings I would go to a tavern just down the street. There I would engage with others about many things including the War in Vietnam. I served two six-month TDY deployments to Andersen AFB in Guam in 1967 and then Kadena AFB in Okinawa in 1968. Sometimes I would meet writers who wanted to learn tidbits about the War. The conversation always fell on deaf ears when it came to B-52s—it was like — what is there to be said?

It was a great summer as I hoofed it all over our Nation's capital and Georgetown. I learned that Dick Gregory, a comedian, author, and war protester would be in DC. I called the Pitts Hotel and bought a single ticket. On the given evening after work, I hailed a Zone Cab. The Cabby and I alone headed across town. Shouts could be heard from the front steps of houses as we made the long drive on that warm summer evening, "Hey, Cracker!"

I had read several of Gregory's books including, *The Shadow That Scares Me* and *Nigger: An Autobiography of Dick Gregory*. Dick had been on another long hunger strike protesting the War. Shortly after the show, he came to the bar where I was seated. What an honor. I learned quite a bit about myself that evening. Within a short time, I found a cab to carry me back to "Foggy Bottom."

Back in September 1968, when I was honorably discharged from duty, several things stood out. For the first time since my wife and I were married in 1966, we were finally really together. We had planned our own future and the stage was set! There was no other choice now but to hit the books in northern Colorado.

To establish a little comfort zone with my four years in the service, I decided to check out the VFW and maybe have a beer. I remember, there was one guy sitting at the bar. As I explained who I was to the barmaid, the fellow sitting at the bar did something to catch my attention. I looked at him and he just sat there flipping me off. I did not return his salutation and went on my way.

By late October 1968, I had met some other students including several veterans. As new veterans and wet behind the ears, we decided to go march with other veterans in the Veteran's Day Parade. We inquired about being involved and got the standard cold shoulder. "—there was no place for Vietnam Veterans in this parade."

So…on Veteran's Day, six of us went to the parade assembly area, looked around, and as the last of the parade proceeded down the street, we just filed in at the rear and followed the parade through town in our own little parade attachment. We were courteous and did not interfere with any of the rituals. This was 1968 and the "baby killers" as we were sometimes called were obviously not wanted.

In the cafeteria, someone asked if I was aware of the group calling itself Vietnam Veterans Against the War.

Having spent considerable time linked into the South East Asia (SEA) Arena, it was then that I determined I was not a Vietnam Veteran. That is a distinction for boots-on-the-ground Vietnam Veterans who have earned that prominent service ribbon. On the other hand, I am very much a Vietnam War Veteran. I have had a great deal of pride in VVAW over the years but only joined as a life member in recent years.

But 1972 seemed to roll out as more of the same for the bombers that I had left 2+ years earlier. They were like a mile-long freight train full of coal pulling out of Wyoming—one after another. Every day, the B-52s made their daily 5,000+ mile round-trip bomb runs over Vietnam and back to Guam. Air Force troops on the ground, like I had been, kept those Big Ugly Fat Fuckers (BUFFS) flying.

Operation Linebacker II or the Eleven Day War came along late in December of 1972. The Allies combined air power unleashed 3,000 sorties and delivered 40,000 tons of bombs in what was the most concentrated air operation of the entire war over Vietnam.

Beginning on the day after Christmas, December 26, 1972, and during the next eleven days into 1973, the BUFFs dropped 15,000 tons of bombs in 729 sorties. Two B-52 Tail Gunners officially downed enemy fighter planes, while hundreds of military targets on the ground were destroyed. Within 15 minutes on December 26th, 1972, 120 BUFFs dropped bombs and hit designated targets.

A total of twenty-four B-52 Bombers were struck by Surface to Air Missiles (SAMs) during that day after Christmas in December. Of these 24 Bombers, fifteen were shot down and lost. Thirty-one (31) of the B-52 crew members who were shot down were captured and held as Prisoners of War (POWs). A further 93 were listed as Missing in Action (MIA's) at the end of the 11-day operation although the final tally was officially 33 Killed or MIA.

B-52D's seated five crew members in the front and they were unique because they had a Tail Gunner in his own compartment at the tip of the tail of the fuselage with four 50 caliber guns. Unlike the ejection seats up forward, the Gunner's Compartment lacked an ejection seat. Gunners rarely survived any bailouts. This writing is especially dedicated to all the Tail Gunners who served on B-52D Stratofortress Heavy Bomber either in South East Asia or anywhere. Thank you!

I was discharged from the Air Force with an "early out" in September 1968. Other than the flight crew, I flew back almost solo to the States from Guam in a KC-135 Tanker. After refueling at Hickam, we landed at SAC Headquarters in Omaha, Nebraska. I finally de-plained at Little Rock, Arkansas, and took a Greyhound Bus back to my home base at Clinton, Oklahoma. After two weeks, I had processed out of the United States Air Force after four years of service.

Ron Bunnell is a Member of VVAW. He was honorably discharged USAF(SAC) on September 5, 1970, with the rank of Staff Sergeant. A2C Ron Bunnell, 461 Field Maintenance Squadron Pride Airman of the Month, September 1966.

Republican National Convention, Miami Beach, 1972.

Entering War, Coming Home

continued from page 14

that alcohol soaked room was singing along with the lines, "We gotta get out of this place if it's the last thing we ever do." Those of us going home had huge smiles as we sang. I later learned that it was the most requested song on the Army's radio station in Vietnam.

The next morning was now my turn to stand and watch the new guys disembark from the plane. They did look young and scared. None of them looked at us. There was a million miles of distance between us. Some of the men yelled the same things that were yelled on my arrival. I was disgusted by their cruelty. I felt sorry for those poor souls coming off the plane. Morale among the soldiers in Vietnam was sunk, not sinking. Heroin would become as common to them as marijuana use during my tour. I knew they were all entering an insane dream, a dream I was beginning to wake from. A dream in which each of them would receive the news, the insane news that anything they experienced in Vietnam was for nothing. This was such a soul crushing truth to grapple with. But there was one area that was not for nothing. They would, if they were lucky, have friendships. Friendships that were deeper, more meaningful and important than any they had before. Friends that were like lovers without the sex. Connections that danced on the thin stage of severe injury, death, instant loss. Nineteen year olds whose friends made the only sense in their world. Friends that brought peace, love and meaning to our mangled lives.

As the last one stepped down from the ramp I couldn't hold back my smile. I couldn't believe this was happening. I felt a lightness going up the stairs into the plane. I was disembarking from the heavy, rot stench air. I had become used to it though.

The stewardess who greeted us looked like a brunette angel. Her voice was the softest thing I'd heard in quite a while. We took our seats and quickly got ready for takeoff. The pilots didn't like to take too long sitting on a runway in the middle of a war. The plane began to move down the runway, faster and faster. My heart raced. As the wheels left the runway a mighty cheer, actually more like a roar, erupted from the men in the plane. We were truly going home and leaving the insanity behind.

A few guys lit joints, no one protested or pulled rank. I felt so good I didn't want to get high. I think the experience I had as we left the ground came close to a good death experience. Ram Dass says, dying is like getting out of tight fitting shoes to total freedom and safety. Those were the tightest fitting shoes one could imagine.

I will never forget that roar as the wheels left the ground. I will never forget the safety and freedom I felt. I sometimes cry as I tell this story. The flight back to the world was waking from a dream. It seemed impossible. I was going home.

Joe Petzel is a Vietnam Veteran, who served as Regional Coordinator for Northern IL and Iowa VVAW, after returning from the war.

I Served As A Civilian Advisor During The Vietnam War

TERRY COLEMAN

The Vietnam War involved both military and civilian personnel.

I served in the State Department's United States Agency for International Development, part of President Nixon's "Pacification Program" from 1969-1971.

After having served in the Peace Corps in India, I wished to return to Asia.

The US Foreign Service was recruiting former Peace Corps volunteers to work in the new Pacification Program in South Vietnam. At the time I was ambivalent about the war. However, I took the job as an advisor to the Vietnamese Social Welfare chief in Quang Tin Province, wanting to help civilian Vietnamese.

My first experience of what I was getting involved in occurred as my plane descended into Saigon. Looking out the window I saw large holes in the ground filled with water. They were bomb craters. The realization that I was in a war zone was chilling. As the jet taxied to the terminal I witnessed green body bags being loaded into a military airplane. That's when my stomach tightened. That feeling lasted the whole time I served in Vietnam.

I was one of the American civilian advisors who had accepted a job with the US Military in a program called CORDS (Civil Organization for Revolutionary Development).

Washington's idea was that US civilians and military working together would assist the Vietnamese and win their hearts and minds to defeat the Viet Cong.

I was housed in a fortified compound in the town of Tam Ky with American military personnel. In this proximity to the military, I became aware that many military officers were more interested in advancing their careers than in fulfilling their current mission in Vietnam. This was also true of many of the civilian advisors.

I soon understood that the results of the Pacification Program weren't working. Most of the local population didn't want Americans there and were weary of the war.

Being a civilian amongst the US and South Vietnamese military offered me the unique perspective of how many of the government civilian advisors and military really functioned.

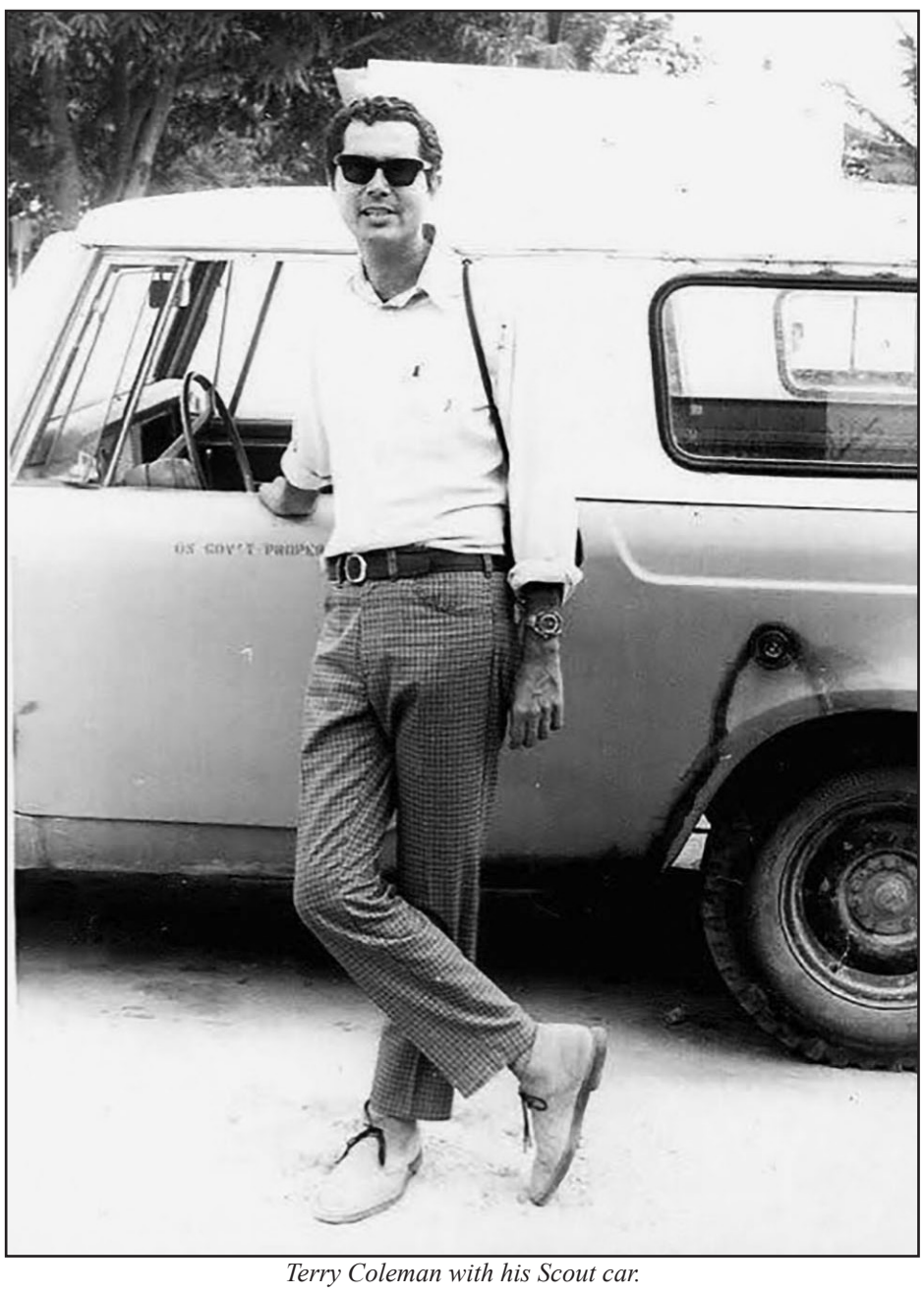
In my job I was responsible for the distribution of US food aid for the needy Vietnamese in the Province to which I was assigned.

This entailed getting food to areas where ground transportation to distribute the aid was too dangerous, so helicopters would fly the food into areas that were designated to receive it. I would fly on the choppers and be there on the ground as the slings deposited the food aide. Much of the food surplus aid was not compatible with the Vietnamese diet. The US government would provide things like canned pasta, bulgar wheat, and powder milk, not rice which was what people wanted and needed.

I was also assigned to assist in the settling of the large numbers of refugees who were flooding into Quang Tin Province. I was given no budget for this big task. I would scrounge discarded materials from nearby army bases and use them to build simple structures to house the many refugees.

It didn't take me long to realize that much of the US Pacification Program was a sham. Although some of the personnel I worked with were serving honorably, I did find that many of them were not. The American personnel that filled the ranks, for the most part, took advantage of their positions as advisors by falsifying progress reports and personally profiting with the corrupt South Vietnamese military.

A number of times I was ordered to sign-off on large amounts of US food aid which did not go to the needy, but instead was diverted into the pockets of those in charge, both American and Vietnamese. I was reprimanded for not going along with their plans. When large numbers of refugees entered into the Province of Quang Tin, I was told to lower the numbers in my report, and alter the data so that the reports would benefit the data for those in charge in Saigon.



Terry Coleman with his Scout car.

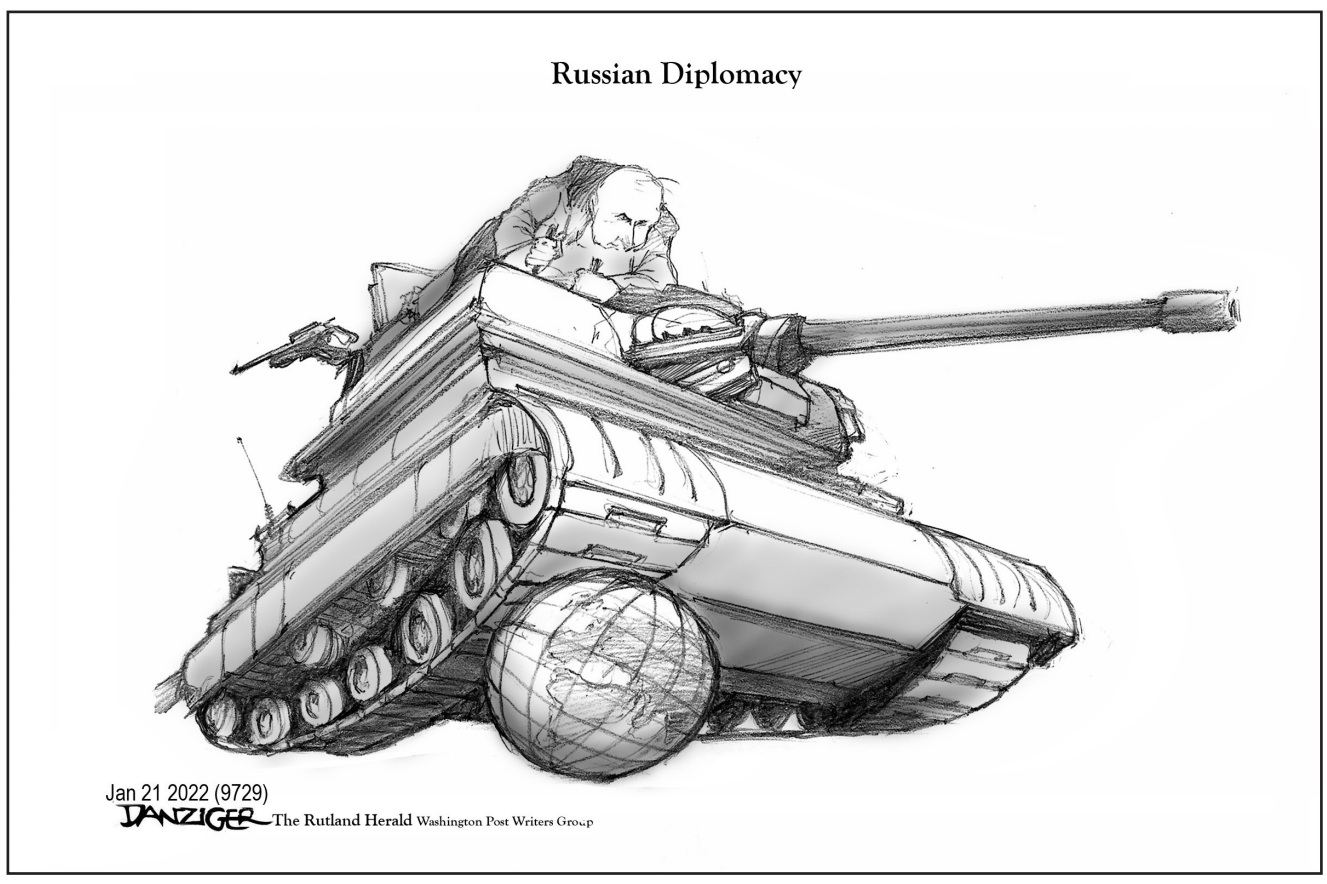
During the winter season, my province experienced a great deal of rain and flooding. Most of the roads were under water. It became difficult to get around. As an AID (Agency for International Development) officer I was to assist the refugees. As I was working alone, I requested help from others and I was told that it was my job alone, not theirs and they refused assistance. As I worked hard finding a truck and helping refugees in their flooded camps, the Americans I lived with didn't give me a hand. They stayed out of the rain and at the compound tiki bar, drinking.

Most of the military who were drafted hated being in Vietnam. I witnessed open insubordination and threats of fragging by the enlisted men. My closest friends during this time were a navy medic (Jones) and an army sergeant. Having a few friendships helped me cope during this time of war. I was experiencing the constant threat of being injured or killed, and felt the constant stress of being in a war zone.

Following my experience in the Vietnam War, I questioned the United State's involvement in Afghanistan and other war zones. I am cautious in believing what the government reports, having learned first hand that the truth was often corrupted.

TERRY COLEMAN LIVES IN TUCSON, ARIZONA WITH HIS WIFE ELLEN.HE IS RETIRED FROM WORKING AS A SCHOOL COUNSELOR.

Choppers carrying foodstuffs at Tom Ky.



THE VETERAN

SECTION C

Volume 52, Number 1 Spring 2022

Return to Vietnam

Andy Berman

For veterans of the US war in Vietnam, that first return trip, taken soon after the end of the conflict or many years later, is commonly an intensely emotional experience. Memories, some suppressed, often come out with a shivering feeling, mental as well as physical, as the sites and people encountered bring back times gone by. Most often this is a healing experience and it is typically unforgettable.

For this veteran, who had never before set foot in Vietnam, that first trip was also a return, a return filled with intense emotion and recalled memories. It was a deeply satisfying experience that led to a long-sought sense of closure similar, I suspect, to that felt by returning veterans who had physically been there before.

No, I had not been to Vietnam in the physical sense, but for ten years Vietnam occupied a significant part of my consciousness during my coming of age formative years. I followed the war news intensely and passionately participated in the anti-war movement and its endless debates about strategy and tactics to end the war. So my first arrival in Vietnam had a sense of coming home to a place I had been emotionally for a long time, indeed a kind of return.

As a teenager, I was drawn into the US anti-war movement in the early years of US intervention. In 1964 I joined one of the first public demonstrations against the war, seeing with my politically virgin eyes the spectrum of the American Left. I was deeply moved by the early war resistance of Special Forces Sergeant Donald Duncan, a counter-insurgency expert in South Vietnam, whose picture in full Green Beret uniform appeared on the cover of the February 1966 *Ramparts* magazine with the intrepid title "I Quit!"

Later, the actions of other war resisters in the military, including Howard Levy, Brian Willson, Gerry Condon, the Fort Hood Three, and others, convinced me that there was a special and persuasive legitimacy in the words and actions of soldiers and veterans who spoke out and resisted war.

I was active in the civilian anti-war movement in several organizations. In one of them, in 1970, I was national co-chair of the Committee of Returned Volunteers (CRV) a group of 1,000 former Peace Corps Volunteers who not only denounced the Vietnam War but also had moved to a position of Solidarity with Vietnam! In 1968 and 1969 the former chairpersons of CRV had been invited on solidarity visits to Vietnam. So I kept in my heart a private hope that my day would come and I too would soon see the land that elicited such passion in so many of my generation.

Unfortunately, that hope soon died! CRV gracefully disbanded in 1971, rightfully or wrongly having concluded that the Peace Corps itself was rendered irrelevant by the monstrous US genocidal war in Vietnam. And with CRV gone, I was out of a job! So I followed another path that also was in my mind and my heart, enlisting in the US Army (despite my 4F status for draft resistance) for the sole purpose of spreading the anti-war message from within.

The story of those next three years 1971-73 is told elsewhere: (https://youtu.be/3wxc9-Nk52U). Significantly, by luck, fate, or design, the US Army did NOT send me to Vietnam. My overseas tour was in West Germany.

In 1974, discharged from the Army, I rejoined the civilian anti-war movement, which by then had declined in numbers, as the Paris Peace Accords had been signed and the US was indeed withdrawing from Vietnam. It was time to move on. I returned to school, studying Engineering at the University of Illinois.

That was a fortuitous choice. With the emerging technology boom, I was able to find a good job and keep it for many years. I worked at AT&T doing telecommunications software development, using the new technologies to bring basic telephone service to the developing world and lower its cost in the developed world. Outside of work, I kept involved in a variety of peace and solidarity work.

Lo and behold, in the mid 1990s with US-Vietnam relations normalized, truly good fortune struck!. AT&T was negotiating a project with VNPT, the national telephone company in Vietnam. There was a need for a couple of AT&T engineers to go to Ho Chi Minh City for a week to work with Vietnamese telecom engineers to establish some of the technical details of how our equipment would interconnect.

Needless to say, I calmly volunteered, trying hard to hide the intense raging passion in my heart of hearts to be selected. Blessed with a coworker Bill, a veteran who had been a US Army MP in Saigon during the war, the two of us were chosen.

Loaded down with the technical equipment needed to do our work, we flew from Chicago to Ho Chi Minh City with a brief layover in Japan. Getting through customs and passport formalities was a breeze once we showed our VNPT and AT&T credentials. Immediately, the reality

Andy Berman during Basic Training at Ft. Lewis, 1971.

of just being in Vietnam, walking the streets, recognizing scenes I knew only from books, movies, television, and photos, was mind-boggling. Ain't peace wonderful!

We stayed in a hotel in the center of the city and went to work every day at the phone company. Our Vietnamese counterparts were very friendly young well-trained engineers, whose technical knowledge of their equipment was remarkable. Fortunately, we interfaced only with technical folks, leaving the business protocol meetings to others. Having worked with telecom engineers in many countries, we were duly impressed at the Vietnamese engineers' skills and indeed thankful because it made our work together go so smoothly.

But our ability to relate to them in terms of our coming of age during the US war in Vietnam was limited. This was 1996. We two Americans had experienced the Vietnam War era as 20-plus-year-olds; they had been infants. The "American War" was history to them, more part of their parents' generation than their own. But we found common ground to chat with them about music, sports, and international pop culture. Ain't peace wonderful!

Since the work went so smoothly, we had the time to explore Ho Chi Minh City. High on our agenda was to find the US military base in the city where Bill had been stationed 25 years prior. We explored maps and tried hard to extract what we could from Bill's memory. We took taxis and asked people in the streets about buildings and other visual clues that Bill could recall. Most often, once we explained that Bill had been stationed there in the US Army, people were remarkably friendly and anxious to be helpful. Ain't peace wonderful!

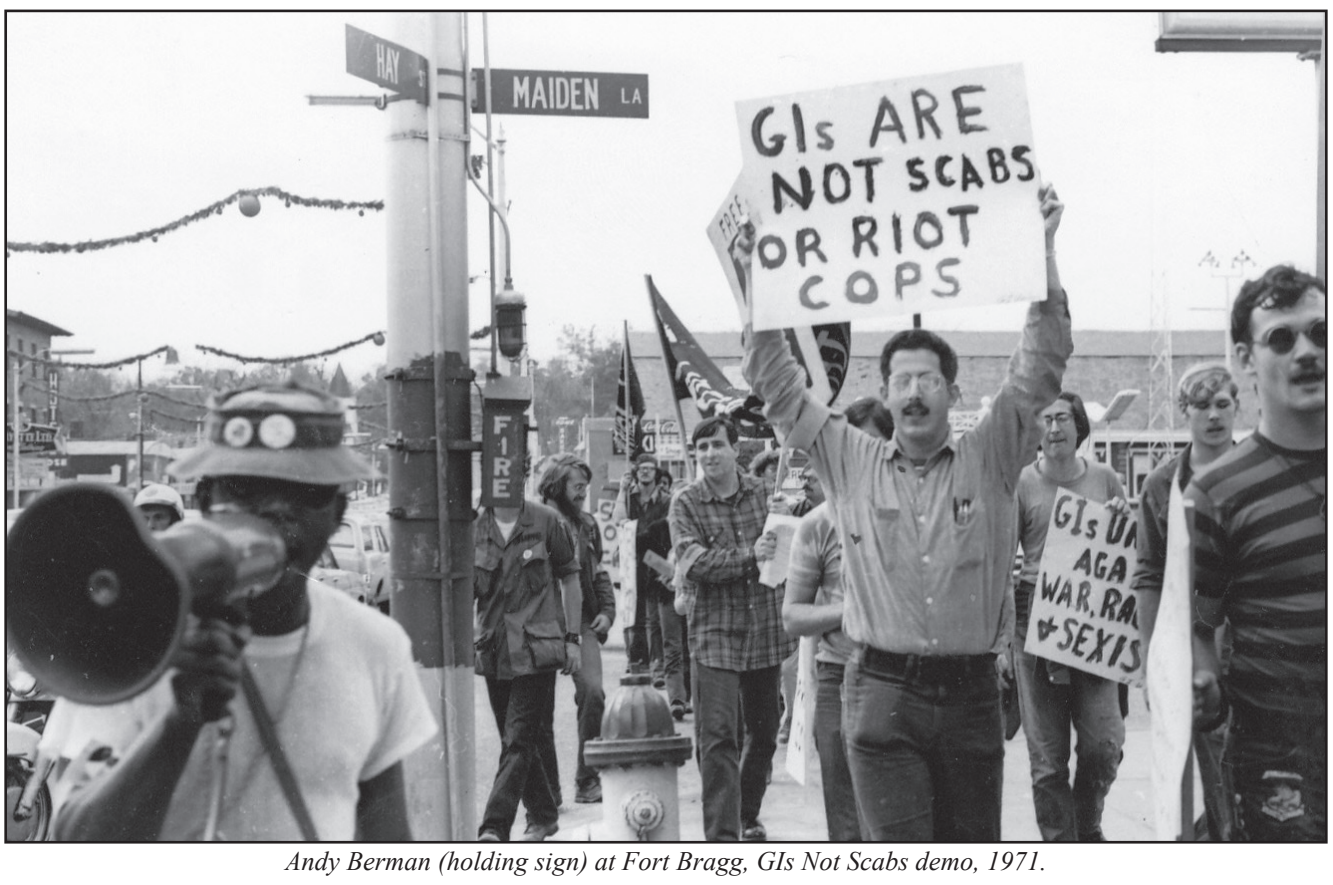
Ultimately we found a place that Bill was fairly certain was where he had been stationed. As is ironically appropriate, the former military base was now a schoolhouse and the surrounding area a kid's playground! Ain't peace wonderful!

We also explored the "Museum of War Remnants" where we saw some captured US military equipment and a photo exhibit of US anti-war protesters and draft card burners. Bill wanted to eat lunch at the Ho Chi Minh McDonalds and get their menu as a souvenir, but I just couldn't! So on that occasion, we briefly parted ways.

On the last day before flying home, we went out to the Cu-Chi Tunnels at some distance from the city. That's where Vietnamese fighters hid in a network of tunnels literally underneath a US military base. It is now a tourist spot where you can crawl through one of the tunnels for a few yards to feel what it was like. It reminded me of the claustrophobia of a full-body MRI scan at a hospital. Yet the tunnels used by tourists had been widened to fit the larger body sizes of foreign visitors.

On the way back, we hit the tourist souvenir shops where I bought a Vietnamese doll for my daughter and a six-pack of Vietnamese beer for my comrades in Chicago VVAW. Ain't peace wonderful!

Andy Berman is a life long peace and justice activist. He was a Vietnam war resister inside the US Army 1971-73. He is currently active in the SOVA (Save Our VA) movement in Minneapolis.



Andy Berman (holding sign) at Fort Bragg, GIs Not Scabs demo, 1971.

The Afghanistan Papers: A Secret History of the War

John Ketwig (reviewer)

The Afghanistan Papers: A Secret History of the War
by Craig Whitlock
(Simon & Schuster, 2021)

I am amazed at the amount of history we have witnessed in our lifetimes. From the end of World War II to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the world has changed, America has changed, and we have learned to be flexible… as a nation, and also as individuals. Unfortunately, most of us have been busy with careers, families, hobbies, interests, or even an occasional get-away vacation. And, while we weren't looking, another batch of history happened. I wonder what the history books will write about the last few years.

It may not come as a surprise if I suggest we have all missed a few of those historic events over the past 75 years. Also, age has become a factor, and we may even have inadvertently forgotten a few important happenings or a few of the details. Take the war in Afghanistan, for instance. Most of us recall that the George W. Bush administration and his gang of neocon chickenhawks rushed us into a war in Afghanistan as a knee-jerk reaction to the deaths of 2,977 Americans on 9/11. Within six weeks, the US had overwhelmed the Taliban-led government in Kabul and killed or captured hundreds of Al-Qaeda fighters. Terrorist leaders, including Osama bin Laden, escaped hiding in neighboring countries. However, almost immediately, members of Bush's cabinet and the Joint Chiefs of Staff worried that there was no exit strategy from Afghanistan, but they kept their fears and misgivings private. The American people were encouraged to heap praise upon our heroic military, especially Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld.

There was no exit strategy, and as the years began to pass, the military kept itself busy with "mission creep." The initial objective was to punish Al-Qaeda for knocking down the twin towers of the Trade Center in Manhattan, and then it evolved into a campaign to eradicate the Taliban and all of the groups it worked with, especially Al-Qaeda. At the urging of the neocons, the mission soon became to convert the Afghan government to an American-style body with democratic elections, a functioning Supreme Court, an anti-corruption authority, a women's ministry, and a vast network of newly-created public schools offering a modernized curriculum. With the help of a cadre of anti-Taliban warlords, our "Northern Alliance" forces quickly took control of all of Afghanistan's northern cities, and the American leadership became concerned. They felt responsible for steering the country toward democracy, but there was no plan. They brought in cots so GIs wouldn't have to sleep on the ground, and they had showers installed. "The guys just played video games," one Major admitted. "They worked out in the morning and did some training in the afternoon." Another Major said it was "actually very boring." A Green Beret wrote an e-mail to the Pentagon from Kandahar, "formerly known as 'The Home of the Taliban', now known as 'Miserable Rat-Fuck Shithole.'"

The Afghans soon learned that if they wanted to eliminate a personal rival, all they had to do was tell the Americans that their adversary belonged to the Taliban. Eager to elicit local help, the CIA dangled bags of cash and recruited war criminals, drug traffickers, smugglers, ex-communists, and other dregs of Afghan society. Things were about to get noticeably and incessantly worse. When President Biden pulled the plug in 2021, the US had spent trillions. More than 775,000 American troops had deployed there, and more than 2,300 died there. More than 21,000 came home wounded, many maimed or incapacitated. We will never know how many Afghans, from all segments of the society, have died or been grievously wounded. Years ago, the Pentagon decided we don't need to know.

Like the infamous *Pentagon Papers* that revealed to the American public the sad, duplicitous, truth behind the Vietnam War, investigative reporter Craig Whitlock's *The Afghanistan Papers* is a revealing history of the lies, self-serving statements, phony reports, and unrepentant hubris by senior government officials and top-level military officers. The deceits pile up like rush-hour cars on an ice-covered highway, crunching and crashing the reader's sensitivities, but the Afghanistan War was no accident. This book reveals all that's wrong with America's headlong militarism and the terrible, inept, out-of-control Congress and cadre that have been steering the ship of state onto the rocks. I strongly recommend that, after reading them both, you place this book next to Tim Bakken's *The Cost of Loyalty* on your favorite bookshelf. As we witness the accelerating decline of America's role on the world stage, these two books will tell you why, and who has been responsible. Who is responsible today, and strong indications of who will be responsible and where we are headed in the future.

As this is written, Russian tanks are rumbling into Ukraine. Russian President Putin has put his nuclear forces on alert. The planet is trembling. As Vietnam veterans, we know that our military is corrupt and self-serving, and terribly incompetent. It's small comfort but damned important to know that these books are out there. Hopefully, some of our leaders will read them and think about their messages. The future of our country, and possibly our planet, is at stake. I highly recommend you read *The Afghanistan Papers*, and I hope you will learn from it. If America is to survive, we must defund the Pentagon and hold incompetent leadership accountable. One fact you won't find in *The Afghanistan Papers* is that not one lying general has been court-martialed, demoted, or sent to prison!

John Ketwig is a lifetime member of VVAW and the author of two books about the Vietnam War. See www.johnketwig.com.

What Could I Have Done? What Should I Have Done?

Jim Wohlgemuth

Writing about 1972 and my personal history does seem a bit trite and self-centered, after all, I did so little. It was my last year in the Navy and I was confident in myself and my ability to survive. So, I had come a long way from the frightened seaman watching the VC rockets slam into the base at Chu Lai while we were beached. I was transferred from the Westchester County LST 1167 to the Point Defiance, LSD 31. I had moved home ports from Yokosuka, Japan to Long Beach. I was counting the days, and through a strange twist of fate, and an inattentive Executive Officer, I would get my request for an early out approved.

I headed home in September sneaking on the plane in my "civis" and with my hair seriously out of compliance. At home, I got ready to attend college at IUP (Indiana University of Pennsylvania). I was leaving the Navy and Vietnam forever. That was the plan and for the most part, it worked; the recognition of exposure to Agent Orange, and a diagnosis of a little PTSD would come later.

College was going great and living was good. Then in 1975, my experience in the military came crashing in and I realized it had all been for nothing. Of course, I knew that in 1972. I knew that our Vietnam efforts were futile in 1969 but now it was real. South Vietnam, where the US had lost over 58,000 of our own while killing millions and leaving a wasteland, was falling. I went home and watched with my dad as NVA tanks roared into Saigon and I started to cry. I had taken many little film clips of my Navy experience (most of which I have posted on YouTube) including our assignment to Market Time and Ready Groups. I went into my bedroom and started watching the films; one after another after another, while I drank a beer or maybe two or three. My Dad came in and said this is really upsetting for you. I told him that I was just so glad it was over but I am also so upset with all that we had done to those poor people of Vietnam, and to each other. I had not been in country like those poor guys dressed in green. I had not suffered as they suffered but now I realized I was complicit in the suffering that was Vietnam. Why didn't I do something beyond the one letter I wrote to the editor of my local *Butler County Eagle*, condemning the National Guard at Kent State. What could I have done? What should I have done?

I was grateful to the Peace Movement for putting the pressure on to end our involvement, but just pulling out still left the carnage, the environmental destruction, and the memories of what we had done. Unfortunately, we could never pull it all out. I had heard about Vietnam Veterans taking a stand, bearing witnesses, testifying, and throwing their medals away. I was grateful and in awe of their courage. Where was my courage? What should I have done, what could I have done? In this time frame I sent my first check to VVAW, I think. I heard that there was talk about building a memorial to the Vietnam War and initially, I was taken aback and wondered why, but then I heard about Jan Scruggs who just wanted to remember the nameless faces that would soon be lost to history. I sent another check, what more could I do? What should I have done?

I was skeptical then grateful when I saw the design of the memorial, of the "Wall." I was grateful when it was done, but despite living in the DC area, I did not go to the dedication. My first daughter was recently born, but, seriously, I did not feel worthy. I had watched the sacrifice and suffering without enduring it. Weeks later, I walked down to see "The Wall" during a lunch hour from my job at the Department of Commerce. I was by myself and when I got there it was wonderful and horrific, all at the same time. I started to tear up and I had to leave, all the while asking myself what could I have done? What should I have done?

After almost thirty years, I would finish my federal career working in the old BIA building right across Constitution Avenue from the "Wall." I would visit once a week slowing down, during a run, to take a breath and honor all those NAMES (thanks to Jan Scruggs) and always wondered what could I have done? What should I have done?

So, I was talking to a friend Al Glatkowki and if anyone knows Al, you know just how much he did and his personal sacrifice. It was during that conversation when I wondered just how many guys are out there like me that still wonder what we all could have done then, back in 1972 or before or since? What should we have done? I wonder how many old guys go through their day with just a tinge of guilt about something we did or something we did not do? I know I do. That is why I will wear my VVAW sweatshirt, wave my Veterans for Peace flag, talk on my little podcast (Veterans for Peace Radio hour on Spotify) about the damage caused by US militarism and imperialism to this day. I have a Vietnam Vet license plate hoping someone will try to thank me for my service. Then I can talk to them about the futility and devastation of war and ask them to try to be more aware of US militarism, imperialism, and the military-industrial, congressional, media, complex. As you can expect, those conversations, when they occur, do not last long here in Tennessee.

I know I will never relieve that tinge of guilt that I feel. I know I can never repay the debt I owe to the Vietnamese people or to the 58,000 on that "wall," or the brave young people of the peace movement and those servicemen and women, those vets who took a stand against that war, but at least now I know I am doing just a little something and I am grateful for VVAW and Veterans for Peace for giving me that inspiration.

Bill Wyman and Ron Kovic at RNC Demo, Miami, 1972.

Jim Wohlgemuth was on the USS Westchester County LST 1167 from 1969 to 1971. He was on the USS Point Defiance LSD 31 from 1971 to 1972. He is a retired Federal employee and Middle School Social Studies Teacher. He is co-host of the Veterans for Peace Radio hour on Radio Free Nashville, Spotify, SoundCloud and Pacifica radio.

Our Veterans

John Ketwig (reviewer)

Our Veterans: Winners, Losers, Friends, and Enemies on the New Terrain of Veterans Affairs
by Suzanne Gordon, Steve Early, and Jasper Craven
(Duke University Press, 2022)

Author Suzanne Gordon is an activist and journalist who, a few years back, became alarmed by a movement to privatize the VA, America's Cabinet-level Department of Veterans Affairs. She has published two insightful and detailed books to counter that movement, *The Battle for Veterans' Healthcare: Dispatches from the Frontlines of Policy Making and Patient Care* (2017) *and Wounds of War: How the VA Delivers Health, Healing, and Hope to the Nation's Veterans* (2018).

Regular readers of *The Veteran* may recall a review I did a couple of years ago, in which I "highly recommended" *Wounds of War* as an insightful and informative study of the VA. Since creating that book, Ms. Gordon has been incredibly busy acting as an advocate for America's veterans. She is Senior Policy Analyst for the Veterans Healthcare Policy Institute, and has traveled the US extensively to speak to audiences or testify before Congressional committees about how our veterans are being treated by the VA. She is an erudite and persuasive speaker, and her efforts have ignited the Save Our VA movement that opposes privatization of the VA and is championed by Veterans for Peace and a large majority of America's veterans. Co-author Jasper Craven is an experienced freelance journalist whose writing has appeared in a wide variety of American newspapers and magazines. He has joined the Save Our VA battle, and in 2020 he launched Battle Borne, a weekly online news outlet covering veterans' issues. Steve Early has a long history of activism and advocacy for workers' rights, safer and healthier workplaces, and affordable healthcare. Those focuses led him to advocate for veterans, as he sees our later-in-life needs for effective healthcare and disability benefits as being addressed by a national system of "workers compensation" we know as the VA.

Together, these three have created another landmark book that offers a comprehensive overview of the status of America's veterans today, and the challenges they (we) will face in the near future. This is a virtual textbook, filled to overflowing with history, personality profiles, and insightful descriptions of legislation passed and pending. The names of many of the celebrities are familiar, and their activities, schemes, and exploits are laid out in a series of chapters that build upon one another right up to the present day. Even more interesting and insightful are the accounts of the various VSOs, or veterans service organizations, both those with waning political influence in Washington, and those created post 9/11 to represent the vets of our ill-conceived and ill-fated War(s) On Terror in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other locations. The book examines such "friendly fire" entities as hearing loss, brain damage, burn pit exposure, MST or sexual trauma, and the efforts of many organizations and individuals to encourage the VA and Congress to care for veterans suffering from these service-related travesties.

Under the subject of veterans organizations, are you aware of all the following? And, do you know which ones are supportive of the VA, and which ones are proponents of privatization and ultimately dismantling the VA? I assume readers of *The Veteran* will be familiar with VVAW (Vietnam Veterans Against the War). Then there are the "Big Six," the biggest of which is the American Legion, and then DAV (Disabled American Veterans), VVA (Vietnam Veterans of America), VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars), PVA (Paralyzed Veterans of America), and AMVETS (American Veterans). Other vet organizations include CVA (Concerned Veterans of America), VFP (Veterans for Peace), Minority Veterans of America, VCC (Veterans Cannabis Coalition), SVA (Student Veterans of America), Common Defense, Veterans for Social Change, IAVA (Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America), About Face (formerly known as Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans Against the War), MFSO (Military Families Speak Out), Vote Vets, Win Without War, Courage to Resist, and SWAN (Service Women's Action Network). There is even a second VFP (Vets for the People), not to be confused with Veterans for Peace. And, it wouldn't be surprising if another dozen organizations have popped up to lobby, gather veterans together, and confuse many Congresspeople as well as other interested observers. Many, of course, seek funding. *Our Veterans* includes some fascinating insights into their histories, financial records, and the actions and antics of some of their "celebrity" leaders.

In the past, government veterans' affairs were centered around the Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs), the VA, and the Veterans Affairs Committees on Capitol Hill. Recently, however, with the outsourcing of many VA functions, enterprising vendors (or potential vendors) have started to hire VSO alumni in much the same way that Pentagon contractors and potential contractors have long employed former high-ranking military officers to take advantage of their networks or connections with the guardians of the government checkbooks. Corporations offering products and services in healthcare, IT, telehealth, and medical record-keeping have sent their representatives and sales forces to the VA like pigs rushing to the trough; all seeking to establish relationships and gain a portion of the VA's $243 billion budget… which is expected to swell far beyond that amount as the vets of the Iraq, Afghanistan, and other military adventures around the world get older. With the prevailing atmosphere in Washington, the impassioned sales pitches of the vendors, and the campaign contributions they offer tend to outweigh the voices and the needs of veterans and their families.

Our Veterans is not a large book, but it shines an intense light on an impressive number of shadowy or oft-neglected areas that we, as veterans, should become familiar with. Because they will affect our VA benefits or healthcare tomorrow and for the future. As most of us are aware, the VA has been widely criticized, especially after a scandal regarding appointment manipulations at the Phoenix VA Medical Center in 2014. A shocking number of "charities" have sprung up, soliciting contributions to help wounded vets. The Wounded Warriors Project is probably the best-known of these, and, while that organization seems to be recovering from a misuse-of-funds scandal in 2016, a whole community of inspired copycats has sprung up. Other groups offering heart-rending pleas for funds that are alleged to be regularly misused are the Circle of Friends for American Veterans, the Coalition to Salute America's Heroes, and the Independence Fund. The book offers discussions of vets with bad paper discharges, mistreatment or lack of treatment of women in the military, residual problems stemming from LGBTQ or racist biases, and stolen-valor phonies, among many others. This little book is jam-packed with information that is not only fascinating, it promises to be incredibly helpful to any vet who will take the time to read it.

This book offers a decidedly anti-war and progressive viewpoint that most VVAW members will appreciate, but it also investigates the darker aspects of outsourcing many VA functions, and the politics, profit opportunities, and personalities that are working toward the ultimate privatization of the VA. Every veteran involved with the VA will find that *Our Veterans* is a reference book they can access as an unprecedented toolbox full of information that will come in handy in every confrontation with the Department of Veterans Affairs. This book contains perhaps the single most concise and accessible guidebook for those vets attempting to wade through the murky swamp of VA bureaucracy and bullshit. I still recommend you have a copy of Suzanne Gordon's previous book, *Wounds of War* close at hand as you interact with the VA, but the smart vet will shore up his defenses by putting both of these wonderful books side-by-side where they can grab them at a moment's notice. The good news is that Our Veterans is scheduled to be published in August, and it is highly, highly recommended!

John Ketwig is a lifetime member of VVAW, and the author of the best-selling memoir …and a hard rain fell: A G.I.'s True Story of the War in Vietnam, and Vietnam Reconsidered: The War, the Times, and Why They Matter.

The Defoliation of America

John Zutz (reviewer)

The Defoliation of America:Agent Orange Chemicals, Citizens, and Protests
by Amy M. Hay
(The University of Alabama Press, 2022)

When the phenoxy herbicides were introduced commercially in the mid 1940s they were generally accepted. They mimicked the growth hormones in broadleaved plants causing them to "grow to death." By the '50s millions of pounds of the poison were sold to control brush, eradicate weeds, manage forests, and other applications.

There were skeptics, and after *Silent Spring* was published by Rachel Carlson, that trend intensified. Ms. Hay illuminates three women from the western US who began documenting and protesting the harm caused to the natural world by modern chemicals. She documents those women fairly well.

When millions of gallons of defoliants were sprayed in SE Asia, especially Vietnam, the practice was intended to clear the canopy and the base perimeters, as well as killing some crops. But the world began to notice. They noticed the miscarriages and the birth defects among animals and humans.

Scientists, environmentalists, and veterans who tilted against the large chemical companies, the regulations, and the constraints of evidence were justified to some extent.

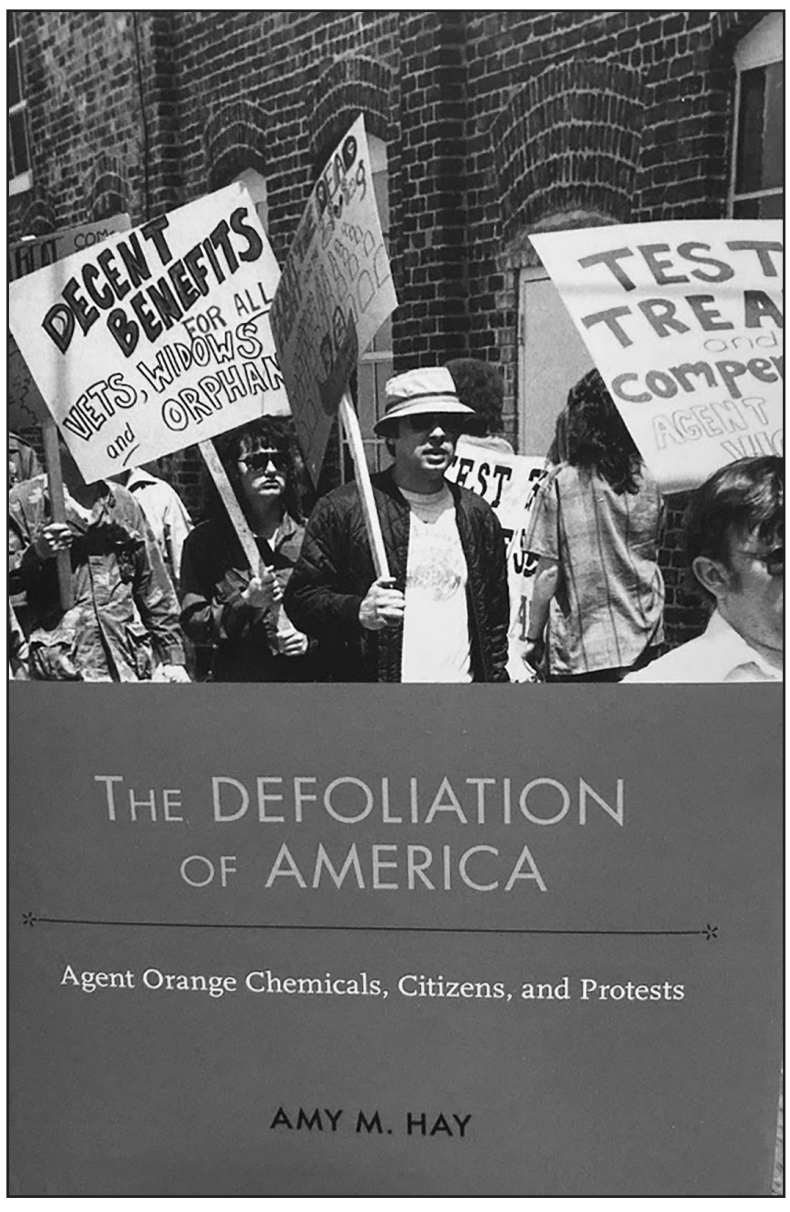
She acknowledges Maude De-Victor, the VA worker who recognized the connection between chemicals and physical problems in veterans.

VVAW plays a significant part in this publication. A large portion of the protest area is dominated by VVAW. Even the photo on the cover is a VVAW protest (full disclosure: I was the photographer).

This is a wide-ranging book that comes at the problems of the phenoxy herbicides from an academic background. Much of the introduction is difficult for a layman, but the body of the book is more comprehendible.

Though the book is informative, I believe the most valuable part is the "Notes" section which contains a fantastic bibliography. A good place to begin or continue your own Agent Orange study.

John Zutz is a Milwaukee VVAW member.



Seeking Quan Am

John Ketwig (reviewer)

Seeking Quan Am: A Dual Memoir of War & Vietnam
by Susan R. Dixon & Mark M. Smith
(ATI Books, 2019)

I have an extensive library of books about our war in Vietnam. I am constantly curious about that war, wondering why it happened, what really happened, how others saw it, and how they are dealing with it up to and including today. My collection includes many accounts from many perspectives; the good, the bad, and the ugly. I rarely happen upon anything actually new or unique, but every book offers tidbits of information to feed my craving.

Once in a while, I find a book that excites me. *Seeking Quan Am* is the latest, and I highly recommend you order one and read it. It is, in fact, two individual accounts. Once upon a time, co-authors Susan Dixon and Mark Smith were high school classmates. In 1961, Dixon's family flew to Germany, where they took delivery of a Volkswagen bus/camper and set off to tour Europe. Just 13 years old, Susan was intent upon journaling about her travels and the emotions she was deriving day-by-day. "It was all emotion and confusion and intensity and sincerity," she recalls, but "I spent a lot of my time being depressed and exhausted." Keep in mind, she was just 13 years old and spending her summer vacation confined within a Volkswagen bus with her parents and two siblings. The legacies of World War II surrounded them, but to Susan, they were all relics of "an evocative and vicariously thrilling past, but the past, nonetheless." But, she writes, "That changed, forever, in one place."

That place was Dachau. She was oblivious, simply walking through another relic when she came upon an unusual building, a curious metal door, and a plaque explaining that this was an oven in which human beings were burned. She was shocked, deeply moved. She knew that what had been done to human beings was done by other human beings. She had come face to face with human nature, and with that realization came the knowledge that this was the nature of war, and it could happen again, and anywhere. At that moment, an "existential dread" became a significant part of her, along with a curiosity for confronting the realities of war.

In 1967, she went on a university-sponsored trip to the Middle East, traveling into the rubble of war-torn Gaza where she was fascinated by an Israeli soldier with a rifle. In 1968, she was living at home and attending the University of North Carolina, attempting to be a Southern lady while she was surrounded by the turmoil of the "youth movement." Pulled and tugged by the war in Vietnam and by her innate outrage and optimism, she joined the opposition to the war and enjoyed "the excitement of sharing a cause we knew was right." She soon realized that the war was threatening all the young men around her, who were having to face the "harrowing collision of patriotism, family expectations, fear, and the growing communal sense that the elders were, in fact, wrong." Unknown to Susan, her former classmate Mark Smith was arriving in Vietnam and learning his own set of lessons.

In the spring of 1969, she was studying art in Italy, and the war in Vietnam seemed far away. When she returned home, however, the UNC campus was a hotbed of anti-war passion and activity, and she became active in heartfelt opposition to the war. She traveled to Washington in the fall of '69 to take part in the enormous Mobilization protest, and in 1970 she went again, to lobby congressmen and senators after Nixon had expanded the war into Cambodia and the Ohio National Guard had expanded it to the campus of Kent State University. She got married and moved to Ithaca, NY, where her husband was in graduate school and being pursued by the Draft. She did not become involved in the anti-war movement, which she observed had taken on a dark, violent tone. Graduate school and two children combined with Watergate and other fateful news took her mind off the war in Vietnam, and it was set aside for years. She earned a PhD at Cornell and focused on raising her two children, who soon became teenagers. In 2011, a friend from graduate school accepted a job at an American School in Hanoi. He invited her to visit, and she accepted.

The experience jarred Susan to her soul. She recognized that the Vietnamese were human beings, with every trait, emotion, history, and courtesy we expect to find in American human beings. "In the night, when I woke, I sobbed. I had learned that my leaders would use the power of words to make people see what is not there or not see what is." She returned home, but now "Vietnam was never far from my mind. It was not just Vietnam-the-country or even Vietnam-the-war. It was Vietnam-the-situation, the state-of-mind, the-unfinished-business. Each person I talked to carried it still, in different ways, and with different reactions. I began to feel intuitively how much had been left undone, how little the failure, betrayal, and anger had been brought out into the open."

She was watching a television documentary about the war when she saw Mark Smith's name, and then she recognized him. He had changed, but she recognized his voice, his mannerisms, and she knew it was her old classmate from high school in North Carolina. He talked about his disillusionment. "I began to feel that someone was taking advantage of our bravery and our courage to no good end." She searched for him and found him on Facebook. She found him, after a long search, learned he'd had a stroke and asked if he had been in that documentary. "Two tours," he said. "Twenty months. I miss it still." He had come home from his second tour and attended classes for two years at the University of North Carolina, where he joined Vietnam Veterans Against the War. He moved to Boston, to Juneau, Alaska, to Las Vegas, and finally returned to the mountains of western North Carolina. He wrote about Vietnam but showed no one. He hid it all away, but began a career as a newspaper journalist and photographer.

Susan discovered a man who was not only living with his memories, he was living in them. He sent her a journal of his second tour and asked her to read it. The story "breached any defenses I had put up, any secure perimeter I had built for myself over the years." His memories were an assault upon her civilian anti-war sensibilities. "We enjoyed freedoms such as none of our peers would ever know," he had written. "Even if we weren't eager to kill people, we were conscious that we had the absolute freedom to do so. We had the freedom to rob graves, to burn whole villages, to call in artillery on abandoned churches, to order jets to bomb and napalm homes, and no one was going to question us about it."

He had done two tours, with an assignment in Germany in between. In the second tour, they had lost their optimism. "The war is getting worse but here I am." Years later, he talked with Susan and said he felt Vietnam was home to him. She suggested a return trip to Vietnam, and he readily accepted the idea.

She found resources to make the trip possible, and a few avid participants to accompany them. Susan brought her spouse, and Mark traveled alone. There were many exchanges with the modern-day Vietnamese, and moments when Mark had to confront his past, but usually, he could only embrace it. Accompanying him, watching his reactions, Susan writes "He came of age in war and part of him never grew out of it. He came to think of Vietnam as home and to recognize Vietnamese veterans as brothers. In that, he found what peace he would know in life." This book is the story of the journeys each of them took. Unfortunately, Mark died in an automobile accident last year. Susan and Mark were on parallel paths, but their viewpoints will always be separate. It is impossible to review this book and the two personalities who are captured in it, within the confines of this review. It is an enormous book, overflowing with insights, reflections, the horrors of war, and some valid analyses of the kinds of people we have become today, shaped by Vietnam. Yes, we are all individuals, but as veterans, we will not only relate to Mark, we will recognize him from the inside out, and ourselves, too. This is a wonderful book, a travelogue of sorts through a country and a mindset we once visited. It has all changed, and so have we, but many scars remain. It's not an easy book to read, but it is supportive, revealing, uplifting, and highly recommended.

John Ketwig is a lifetime member of VVAW, and the author of ...and a hard rain fell: A G.I. 's True Story of the War in Vietnam and Vietnam Reconsidered: The War, the Times, and Why They Matter.

Before

Before I lose the wonder of
The dawn at sunlight's kiss,
Before I cease to hear the sparrow
Singing in purest bliss,
Before I can no longer bask beneath
A canopy of trees,
And wonder at the mighty waves
Of the vast and endless seas,
Before the wolves no longer howl
Beneath the pale moonlight,
Before the winged creatures fail to hover
In full flight,
Before the prides and herds and pods
Of majestic beasts are killed,
All to slake the thirst and greed
Forever unfulfilled,
Before the careless appetites
And the whimsies of today
Turn youthful blooms and slender shoots
To acrid ashes grey,
Before we burn and maim and scar
Our only real home,
Before she turns her face away
From children she will soon disown,
Before the dark envelops us,
And the stink of death sets in,
Before we mourn the loss of lives
From a battle we cannot win,
If only when despair descends,
And naught but eternal strife
Rule over this once-promised land
Will we learn to value life?

—David Sandgrund

I Was Wrong

War itself is, of course, a form of madness.
It's hardly a civilized pursuit.
It's amazing how we spend so much time
inventing devices to kill each other and so
little time working on how to achieve peace.
—Walter Cronkite

I spent every day in Vietnam
thinking we should not be there.

As I watched "Shock and Awe"
I thought we should not be doing this.

As I watched Putin invade Ukraine
I thought this could be the end.

My hope for my child and grandchild is that
someone will find a different way to handle disputes.
It's too late for my generation.

I thought by now we would be over war.

I thought we would realize that war is the
worst thing humans can do to one another.

I was wrong.

—Michael Nelson

Memories of War Do Not Go Away

Ed White (reviewer)

Lessons Learned
by Dale Ritterbusch
(Viet Nam Generation, Inc & Burning Cities Press, 1995)

In his collection of 73 poems, Dale Ritterbusch does not let you escape the experience and trauma of the Vietnam War and other conflicts. This short 121 pages of poems are divided into three parts, that can be loosely called before Vietnam, being there, and coming home. He doesn't call them that, in fact, they are designated I, II, and III.

Ritterbusch served in Vietnam as an Army Lieutenant from 1966 to 1969 as a liaison officer. That does not describe all his activities, as his poems detail. His second collection of poems is called *Far From The Temple of Heaven* . After Vietnam, he received a BA, MA, and MFA., and has taught at the university level since.

Part I, *When It's Late*, combines a restlessness at home after the war while holding a memory of someone who died:

...turning a spadeful of war
over and over, and always,
in the vigilant spin of this earth
digging it up before morning.

In the collection, the poet continues going into the war, and this is only the second poem, in *Geography Lessons*, which describes a common coming home reaction: "Not once does the family ask questions" In *The Somme*, he asks:

You kind of wonder if they ever change
the numbers in any recorded history of the war
and add one more to the list of the dead.

There is a relentless going backward and forward in his poems, even in the title *The Right Thing To Do: Mizocz, Ukraine, 1942*—back to World War II. In this poem, it is the execution of a young and beautiful woman.

In Part II, the poems are focused on events in the war, enemy interrogation, night ambush, children begging, bombing by B-52s, sex in brothels, etc. The poem which gives the collection its title: *Lessons Learned* describes military classes stateside on booby traps particularly, with a 105 round:

All these years, lessons learned
and unlearned, this one still stays
this lesson of one false step,
the wrong move, that's always made
no matter the training, no matter
how much care is taken.

In Part III, the poem: *Back In The World*, one of the few prose poems reflects on common thoughts after you have been through it all and returned from Vietnam in the lines:

...I'd left as much or more
behind as I'd come home to.

...I would now,
But then I thought I could take care of myself-
I'd been there – I didn't need any help...

Ritterbusch has a great talent for combining so much in a poem. In the poem, *Shoulders*, he talks and drinks with a friend in the Officer's Club in 1969. They talked tactics, mistakes made, and then women. The conversation turned to a woman's shoulder, its smoothness.

...Then two weeks later
You were dead – a letter said it all
I've hated mail the long years since.

He ends the poem reflecting on his wife's shoulders. He is a poet who takes you down a road and then you step on a mine.

I'd wish I had known of Ritterbusch's poetry before I taught my Vietnam History course. The collection fills in so much:

We share the dark and the silence,
the silence of the world
in response to inarticulate horrors.

Ed White is a Marine Vietnam combat vet with memberships in VVAW, VFP, and VVA. He has taught courses on the Vietnam War at Triton College in Illinois.

Eighteen Years Before He Died

At first light Mike walks point across the flat dry field.
Behind him, the medic I once was, twenty-two barrel
Pointed south, our foot steps launching small white clouds.

We're hunting ground hogs, you understand,
Not like the green time, hunting each other down.
But today, under a bright Michigan sun
There'll be no shouts or body count.

In the distance, reactor stacks jut against the open sky.
In the eye of my mind I frame the scene, step into it,
Proclaim: Medic with rifle and nuclear power–
It's the perfect holiday card!

You wouldn't, says Mike.
I toss him my camera. Hold the pose.
Tell him, take the picture. Take it.

Click.

That year my vet friends got the gag.
Most civilians didn't.
Patrol, jungle, ambush, monsoon—
What do they know of such things?

It grows late. Here's to Charles 'Mike' Wilson—
Third platoon RTO, loving father and husband,
Hard worker, avid sportsman, killer of ground hogs.
Lover of life.

—Marc Levy

Marc Levy.

Voting for War

Steve Krug (reviewer)

Voting for War: A US Congressman's Awakening to the Lies Behind the Iraq Invasion
by Walter B. Jones with Taylor Sisk
(McFarland, 2021)

In a 2013 speech Walter Jones delivered to the Young Americans for Freedom: "I've always believed that this entire deception was driven by Cheney (and) I said, somewhat overdramatically, Lyndon Johnson's probably rotting in hell right now because of the Vietnam war and he probably needs to move over for Dick Cheney"

Walter Jones was (he died in 2019) an interesting man. He switched from being a Democrat to a Republican, was a lifelong conservative who voted for going into Iraq and rued doing so. The book does an excellent job of exposing the lies that got us into Iraq and discusses Jones' wrestling with the truth of how we march into wars. He was intellectually honest enough to admit he made a terrible mistake in supporting the US Invasion and human enough to talk about the emotional costs it took on the families of the military personnel and the country as a whole. He talked about the jingoism that fueled the "support the troops, support the war" notion ("Patriotic Correctness"- a term coined by Iraq veteran Phil Klay, noted in V*oting For War*) and tried to suggest ways from having a war based on lies happening again and again.

The book has short (from one to several paragraphs) insertions from people ranging from Ron Paul to Dennis Kucinich (who spell check wanted to change to Zucchini, btw). While Jones seemed to favor the Libertarian slant of Paul, he also said his mistrust of government didn't interfere with his job as a congressman.

Jones talked about the importance of debating the war despite that doing so was still construed, by most, as being anti-American. He talked about the lack of debate, both before and after the invasion, as having a profoundly disastrous effect on our credibility in the world. Closer to home, he said that not challenging the lies that got us into Iraq helped pave the way for Trump because we considered the lies/phony patriotism/nationalism as part of normal discourse.

In reading this book I kept thinking it would be great to give a copy to friends/family who still think Iraq was necessary and honorable. Jones was definitely a fellow who "honored the warrior, not the war."

"Well, I now see that being loyal to the men and women we sent to fight in Iraq would have meant getting them the hell out of there"-Walter Jones

Steve Krug is a retired Merchant Marine captain, was a conscientious objector during the American war in Vietnam and is a VVAW member.

Tipping Point: An Inspiring Break From War

RG CANTALUPO (REVIEWER)

Tipping Point
by D. E. Ritterbusch
(Cyberwit.net, 2021)

Tipping Point is not a book of war poems. As the author himself writes, "Collections that are heavily weighted with poems such as *Interiors* and *Poem* (i.e. two poems that do have graphic images related to war) are and have been dismissed or overlooked by readers preferring softer stuff." Despite that, many of the poems do feel like they were influenced by the author's war experiences and resonate with feelings of loss or grief.

Take a poem like *Green Tea*:

There is this tea
I have sometimes,
Pan Long Ying Hao,
so tightly curled
it looks like tiny roots
gnarled, a greenish-gray.
When it steeps, it opens
the way you woke this morning,
stretching, your hand behind
your head, back arched,
toes pointing, a smile steeped
in ceremony, a celebration
the reaching of your arms.

Or *Been Awhile*:

It has been awhile
since I've heard swarms of music,
summer full on with a blast
of heat that lasts into the deepest reaches
of the night. I can reach no further
and the song is one of repentance
or all the things I have not done.

Before the heat of morning takes hold
I note the shell of a cicada
clinging to the rough bark
of a backyard tree. It holds
that song, yearning for return,
a strong repetitive note, a hint of remembrance,
harbinger of what music next be sung.

These poems are gentle, soft-spoken musings that offer little epiphanies and grace to simple moments in life. There's a fine musicality and clarity to the language the author uses, and the poems evoke moments of simple grace.

Love also permeates throughout *Tipping Pois*t. The author often refers, speaks to, or engages a significant other. In *The Lingering Flavor of Rice* the author alludes to two different loving experiences and reminisces on how rice evokes each. "It was another time, another country,/ and the pleasures were so new." He then goes on to tell us how he always associates the lingering "fragrance of rice" with making love.

These associations from the past to the present offer the reader a sentimental journey through the author's life, from a young man's love in a foreign country to his present life. The poem offers a bridge between what the author felt once, a seemingly long time ago, to what he feels now. The "fragrance of rice" cooking is the connection between love in the past and love in the present.

Another beautiful aspect of Ritterbusch's poetry is the way he can evoke transcendent moments from the most trivial of experiences. In poems such as *A Flittering Cosmology*, he encounters a "crashed dragonfly… unable to lift" itself out of the water and meditates on how saving the dragonfly from sure death replenishes us all. When the dragonfly "launches into the quiet sun", the reader feels a kindness and caring that is rare among humans, especially when one thinks of insects, even one of incredible beauty like a dragonfly.

But here, it's best for the poet (or narrator) to speak for himself:

I scoop the dragonfly,
exhausted, from the water, a smooth
cupping of my hand beneath
brought up into that most familiar
element of flight. He rests
on my index finger, sunlight
quickly drying his wings.

The narrator then questions his "anthropomorphizing an insect", imagining the dragonfly bending his "head down…as if a kiss of thanks" for saving him, then dismisses the gesture as "nonsense"—"he thought my finger/ to be food, sustenance, replenishment—."

But the narrator is not done. He prefers another explanation:

both of us here but briefly,
a chance meeting, the day balanced
on a still point; it could all go
either way, spilling into the drink.

Ritterbusch ends the poem with this transcendent and benevolent notion:

our dragonfly
launches into the quiet
sun, is lost against the tree line,
all of us replenished,
so resplendently sustained.

A Flittering Cosmology is my favorite poem in the book. The simple lifting of a dragonfly out of the water, saving it to fly away versus it drowning or being eaten by a fish, arouses our better angels and offers a beautiful moral insight into a cosmology of kindness and reverence. I especially enjoyed the meandering line breaks which seemed to reflect the gentle swaying of the narrator's canoe as he glided along on the lake contemplating the wonder of nature and this encounter with a strange and alien creature. It made up for some of the poems which were a little too abstract for me, poems which in my earlier life as a literature professor I might have called "academic" poetry.

But that was twenty years ago, and times have changed. Amanda Gorman is the Poet Laureate of the inauguration, and often what is considered to be "good" is what finds its way onto Tiktok and goes viral. As a reviewer, I defer to what resonates with me, and many of Ritterbusch's poems do resonate and inspire. And, even though I am a war veteran, I enjoy and value poems that have nothing to do with war. Considering what's going on in Ukraine, it's an invaluable break from a life that is deeply disturbing.

RG CANTALUPO (AKA ROSS CANTON IS A POET, PLAYWRIGHT, FILMMAKER, NOVELIST, AND DIRECTOR. HE SERVED IN THE 25TH INFANTRY DIVISION AS AN RTO FOR AN INFANTRY COMPANY FROM 1968-69.

Just Like Me

STEVE KRUG (REVIEWER)

Just Like Me: The Vietnam War/The American War
A documentary film by Ron Osgood

This film takes stories from US veterans, North Vietnam veterans, South Vietnam veterans, other non-combatants and weaves their remembrances into a documentary that tries to show different levels of commonality and human connection.

"Just Like Me"—this part of the title comes from one US vet realizing his Vietnamese counterpart had similar experiences and desires. Some parts of the stories from all three military's show the vets had similar feelings and experiences during the war, like loss of comrades, being separated from family/loved ones, remembering certain campaigns and battles. Other experiences are unique: a Vietnamese woman's recollection of growing up being bombed as a normal part of life certainly has no US parallel, indeed there is a mention by a US serviceman that bombing from thirty thousand feet separates one from the results. The film notes PTSD from US servicemen but doesn't show stories from either North or South Vietnamese experiencing the same. A particularly telling difference was a North Vietnam vet telling of the loss not only of his comrades but also the deaths of family at home from the war, certainly no US comparison there. One of the connecting stories tells of a US serviceman coaxing a wounded North Vietnamese out of hiding, the other a North Vietnamese treating an injured downed US Pilot. Both are proud that they were able to get their prisoners out alive, treating their enemies like humans.

"The Vietnam War/The American War"—this part of the title comes from the same US serviceman finding out the Vietnamese consider our "Vietnam War" to be the "American War"

While I understand the film was put together to allow each participant their own narrative, I would have liked to know a bit more about things mentioned but not fleshed out. What did the US vet think of the movie *Platoon*? The film shows him talking about going to see it but not his reaction. How did the Vet with survivor's guilt learn to deal with it? There are scenes depicting nationalism but no discussion of how nationalism hinders humanizing of the "others." I'm not sure why the filmmaker put unresolved/unexplored scenes such as these into a film meant to develop compassion and understanding. I would also question the inclusion of the term "Viet Cong," a label coined to degrade the opposition

The film as a whole is well worth watching as it does challenge the notion that enemies are sub human and therefore disposable.

STEVE KRUG IS A RETIRED MERCHANT MARINE CAPTAIN, WAS A CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR DURING THE AMERICAN WAR IN VIETNAM AND IS A VVAW MEMBER.

Thich Nhat Hahn, RIP

Thich Nhat Hanh died the other day.
I saw an email message about it
Just as I finished a mindfulness
Session online, provided by the VA.

My first lesson in mindfulness
Was 50-some years ago,
when this tiny Vietnamese Buddhist monk
transfixed a regiment-sized cohort
Of Vietnam vets at an anti-war
Encampment on the Mall in Washington, DC.

This poet of people we'd inflicted war on
Stunned us with his quiet eloquence—
His voice conveying anguish from the
Farming villages we'd destroyed.

This man of peace stood amidst
Towering combat-clad warriors
And shamed us to do more
With our war memories—
To tell the terrible truth
Mindfully.

—Jan Barry

Who You Are Told Is The Enemy

Had to stare, in absolute wonder
in the smoke and stench of the battle
at this young, young Viet Cong,
grinning his death grin aimed
at the boy who killed him, me.

A kid, he was a kid, like me. Sorry, I just
could not then, cannot now, may never get past that.
I should be afraid of, should hate this boy
dying so miserably
defending his family, his home?

All governments, can and do
try to bend you to their will.
You young, clueless Russian Grunts
may, if you survive, find yourselves
shaking your heads also as I did.

I want peace, but a piece of me
wants a young Ukrainian boy or girl,
defending their family, their home,
standing alive over you instead,
and I ask Buddha forgiveness for that.

—David Connolly

The People vs. Agent Orange

Paul Nichols (reviewer)

The People vs Agent Orange
by Alan Adelson and Kate Taverna
(ITVS, 2021)

Consequences of a past war experience are usually far-reaching and everlasting—what I think of as war's hereafter.

Formidable advances in technology have generated various long-term health problems for US servicemen and women. And likewise, to opposing forces and the general public who reside in the war-torn countries, including the unborn.

History provides too many examples: Ionized radiation exposure during nuclear testing in the 1950s in Nevada and South Pacific Islands caused numerous cancer deaths among witnesses too close to ground zero. Gulf War Syndrome from Operation Desert Storm in 1991 and later wars in Iraq and Afghanistan spawned significant human-made health maladies from factors such as toxic exposure to smoke and fumes from burn pits and contamination from depleted uranium in US weaponry.

It's typical for political influences, endless scientific investigations, and economic concerns, which are often linked, to carry on for decades. By the time accurate medical determinations are made, countless affected victims are terminally sick or have died.

As a Vietnam veteran, my focus is on Agent Orange and various other "agents" sprayed on jungles, forests, cropland, and waterways in Vietnam and parts of neighboring countries with disregard for long-lasting consequences. A *PBS* documentary titled *The People vs Agent Orange* was broadcast in June, 2020. Since learning of this film, I have been haunted by the deaths of my many Nam Vet brothers who have died from Agent Orange related cancer and other grievous diseases. This included several deceased vets I'd known for years from nearby NH towns. It is as if these vets, years after returning from the war, were killed in Vietnam and didn't know it!

Americans are rightfully angered and revulsed at other countries' use of chemical weapons during wartime. Sadly, the widespread spraying of dioxin, one of the deadliest compounds known, even in minute quantities, was a key component of Agent Orange and other infamous "Rainbow Agents." This vegetative defoliation program was a form of chemical warfare.

Originally labeled Operation Hades, the US Air Force program's code name soon changed to the more palatable Operation Ranch Hand. The unofficial program mascot was a parody of Smokey the Bear with the motto, "Only you can prevent a forest." The first aerial spraying took place in early 1962 using specially rigged Air Force C-123's and ended in 1971. Throughout the war, all branches of our military applied the herbicides, which were also sprayed by helicopters, riverboats, trucks, and individual backpacks.

US bases, such as the stateside Eglin Air Force Base, served as early test sites. Infantry outfits training on the base and spray handlers were exposed to dioxin poisoning. Storage areas also became contaminated.

No protective gear was issued or worn when spraying. Neither villagers nor American and Vietnamese military personnel were told of the dangers of the herbicide spraying. In fact, they were told that the materials were safe! Men, women, and children in contaminated areas drank the poison, ate it, inhaled it, and wore it. Military applications of the herbicides were at rates much stronger than recommended by manufacturers. During spraying operations, little concern was given to mist drift from windy conditions, so unintended areas were also poisoned.

In the rivers of Vietnam, brown-water military personnel became subject to dioxin contamination and its associated misery. The VA now recognizes specific blue water navy locations where personnel were exposed by the Agent Orange spray program.

Principal suppliers of these agents were Dow Chemical and Monsanto, but there were others. Chemical company boardroom discussions, secret pentagon reports, and political warmongers were aware of the calamitous peril caused by the Rainbow Agents. In 1988, Dr. James Clary, an Air Force researcher associated with Operation Ranch Hand, wrote to Senator Tom Daschle, "When we initiated the herbicide program in the 1960s, we were aware of the potential for damage due to dioxin contamination in the herbicide. However, because the material was to be used on the enemy, none of us were overly concerned. We never considered a scenario in which our own personnel would become contaminated with the herbicide." More recently declassified documents indicate that health consequences received little or no regard.

Generally referred to as Agent Orange, the "rainbow" included Agents Pink, Purple, Green, White, and Blue. Striped colors painted on barrels of the stuff identified the contents. Approximately 20 million gallons of these poisonous concoctions were sprayed, of which more than half was Agent Orange. All except Agent Blue were sprayed to kill vegetation on the Ho Chi Minh Trail, along rivers, and across much of the countryside. Agent Blue contained high levels of perilous inorganic arsenic used to attack the country's food supply, killing life-sustaining crops.

The tragic legacy of these monstrous chemicals continues to this day, horribly affecting a multitude of US veterans, and their kids, and thousands of Southeast Asian families. Prolonged studies have proven that miscarriages, spina bifida, and other truly horrific physical offspring deformities have a direct correlation to dioxin exposure. Diseases from Agent Orange poisoning have been proven to sometimes skip a generation, striking grandchildren of war survivors.

The Veterans Administration has long maintained a registry of military vets who served in defoliated areas based on service records. Since at least the mid-'80s, I've periodically received the VA's Agent Orange newsletter providing relative updates.

I feel that it is of utmost importance that tragedies such as the use of Agent Orange be featured in history textbooks and discussed in high schools, colleges, and other public forums so that such offenses can be prevented in the future. The *PBS* documentary, *The People vs Agent Orange* offers one way to understand a dark side of US history rather than it being swept under the rug as could happen if legislation such as HB 544 becomes NH law.

Paul Nichols is a long-time member of VVAW, seriously wounded by a landmine during America's War in Vietnam while serving in the Marines in I Corps.

Letter to the Vietnam Memorial Wall

Bill Potvin

Based on my conventional education (parochial school, public high school, and State University), I have always held a certain sense of duty to my country. I had friends that served in Vietnam during the mid '60s while I got deferments for being in college.

The draft was still in place. When I graduated in June of 1969, I enlisted in Army OCS (Officer Candidate School) per my parents' suggestion. We all felt that the US was worth the sacrifice back then. The US had the greatest Constitution, an extensive middle class and a successful progressive tax structure. We were also respected around the world for the support of human rights and a great accessible education system.

I flunked out of OCS and went to Nam as an E-1. When I arrived in Vietnam, I was at a low point of my life, but soon rebounded as I met welcoming enlisted men who seemed so much more human than the many officer candidates I'd encountered. I arrived "in country" in May of 1970, right at the time of the infamous Kent State Massacre.

I began my service as a jeep driver for a Company Commander of the 65th Engineer Battalion, 25th Infantry Division. Serving one tour of 11 months, I finished as a Spec. 5 Demolition Specialist, and saw combat on several occasions. I was given a Bronze Star. I never felt like we were the bad guys...even after I left Nam to do some time in the States.

Now I am a Veteran For Peace, having joined in the '90s after participating in "Stonewalk," a tribute to civilians killed in wars. I have continued to learn more about our addiction to war. I still believe in National Defense but not national offense, which is what we did in Nam and are doing today—pathologically. We preemptively attack, we occupy, and we make enemies incessantly. We lose many young soldiers as you can observe right here at the Wall (I knew at least 4 of them). We also kill and maim many, many innocent "enemies" ...but their names are unrecorded. Our actions blatantly violate The Golden Rule (and the directives of all major religions).

I now see that I was positioned from early years to see ourselves as heroes, when, as war participants and aggressors, we are really pawns in a big money-making scheme.

Look at all the names in front of you. They were fodder in an immoral, illegal military assault. The Vietnam War was a giant mistake.

I feel very fortunate that I carry no personal "baggage"—no friends were blown away, I did not bust any baby's heads, burn any hooches down, or rape any women. I sleep well and don't have to self-medicate. If I did, I might be looked down upon as a "veteran bum" that could not get my stuff together!

Please don't bask in the glory of this place, for there is very little of it here. These guys all lost their lives, but it was not for defending our country. They got used and paid the ultimate price.

It's now known that we were lied to repeatedly during the Vietnam War, just like we are being lied to today. In our quest for empire, this will always be the case. Please repeat after me: "WAR IS A LIE" and read the book of the same name by David Swanson. All those names on the Wall are begging you for that.

Bill Potvin served one tour in 'Nam (May 1970 to March'71), with the 65th Engineer Battalion 25th Inf. Div., as a Sp 5 demolition specialist for the 2nd half of his tour.

The Last Patrol, 1972.

Just Like Me

RG CANTALUPO (REVIEWER)

Just Like Me: The Vietnam War/The American War
A documentary film by Ron Osgood

Ron Osgood's *Just Like Me* is more than just a film about war. It is a film about the people who go to war; what they look like, feel, think, believe and create. Osgood isn't interested in showing one side pitted against another in battle, or footage of firefights, or bombings, or any of the horrific images we associate with war. Instead, what Osgood presents is so much more important and significant than that.

The film focuses more on survival and resilience; reconciliation and forgiveness; truth and love. From the first frame to the last, it presents a rare and memorable premise: that as soldiers and civilians — the victors and the conquered; the invaders and the invaded; men, women, and children; the young and the old; Vietnamese and Americans — we are more alike than different. We all have the same hopes and desires; wishes and fears; trauma and compassion; pain and forgiveness; and most importantly, love; love for one another; love for our friends and families; and love for humanity. The war experience may be inhumane and horrific, yet it often affects and changes us in ways that somehow evokes our better angels.

Tim O'Brien, the well-known author of *The Things They Carried*, tells us the story of how he still feels guilt for a Vietnamese boy he believes he killed. Kimo Williams shares how he became a musician in Vietnam, and after he returned home, became a world-renowned composer. Each story surprises and amazes us with their poignancy and resonance.

There's the story about the artist Richard Nicholson whose sketchbooks from Vietnam were lost for fifty years and then were unbelievably found—just as they were—by a museum curator as she was sorting and organizing mementos from the various wars since WWII. Nicholson, as well as the viewer, is emotionally devastated by the beauty of the images he created as a young soldier in Vietnam. He even says they are like images from another artist. And they are! They were sketched by an artist whose experience in Vietnam was filled with wonder and innocence, a young man's vision of a strange, new land. Now, as an older man, he feels the full emotional impact of that earlier time.

There's the story of Nguyen Duc Toan, a Vietnamese soldier who saved F-4 Phantom pilot Philip Kientzler after he crashed, and, forty years later, contacts Kientzler to meet with him in friendship and reconciliation. They write letters and set up a meeting in the United States, only to have Kientzler die of a heart valve problem before they ever meet. Toan is heartbroken but arranges a meeting with Kientzler's family and they have an extraordinary ceremony at Kientzler's grave.

Hung Xuan Nguyen tells his story of being a South Vietnamese soldier and how the overthrow of the South Vietnamese government turned his life upside down. He says, after the overthrow, "we had nothing." He was on the wrong side of the war and paid the price. He became a refugee and eventually immigrated to the United States.

Haley Nguyen, (no relation to Hung Xuan Nguyen), was a child when she immigrated to the United States. She tells us about the small, overcrowded boat her family took to escape Vietnam after the Saigon government fell. It's a harrowing story of survival and resilience. She learns to adapt to American culture and never returns to Vietnam. Her story of resilience is inspiring and memorable.

Kimo Williams learned how to play guitar in Vietnam and then put a band together which toured various fire support bases during his tour. Williams came home and studied music and became a composer. His work has been performed throughout numerous venues in the United States and he has created a number of albums.

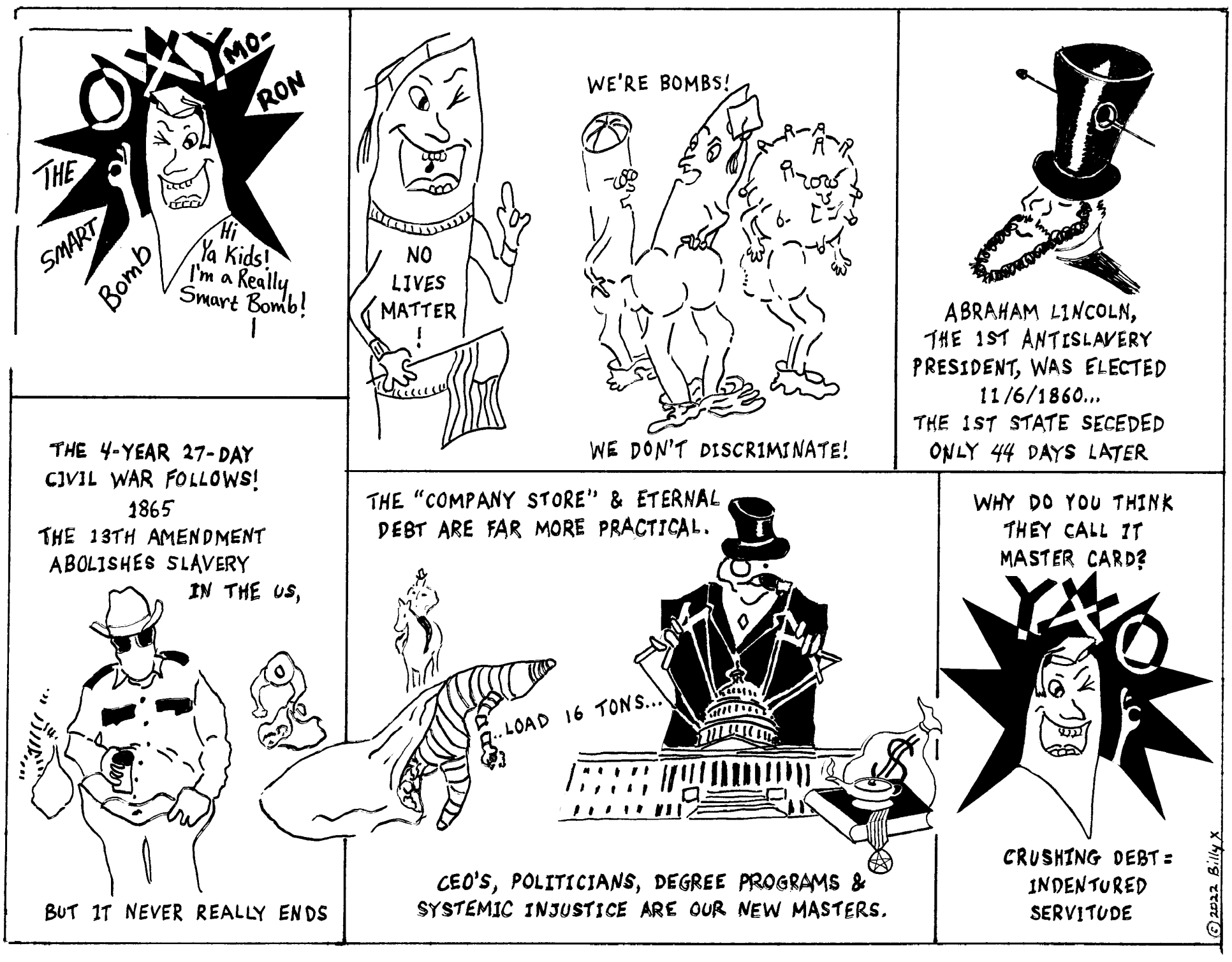
Beyond these and other awe-inspiring stories, *Just Like Me* offers a phenomenal soundtrack which combines ballads, rock and roll, orchestral pieces, and instrumental music in a beautiful tapestry of sounds to complement the images and words. There is Kimo Williams' wonderful orchestral piece which blends traditional marching or parade music with a kind of meandering inspirational theme. It is both patriotic and revelatory.

The direction and editing are also superb. The footage from the war itself is unique and inspiring and the assemblage of the interviews of Vietnamese—both North and South—and of American soldiers are memorable and filled with emotional and poignant moments.

I was particularly impressed by Phil Zook's story of heroism and remembrance. Though Zook is a decorated hero who kept calling in support even though he was wounded twice, he reminisces on the men he lost in the firefight. His compassion and empathy for the soldiers who died around him—his RTO, his point man, and others—he wishes he could have done more to save them. His humility and compassion are a moving testament to the best of American soldiers and one from which we can all learn.

I highly recommend every veteran see this film. I saw it three times and each time was touched by the positive significance and inspiration of the stories. I don't know when it will be out for the public to see. The copy I watched was a reviewer's copy. I'm not even sure if the version I watched was the final cut. But this is a memorable film and I would reach out to Osgood to find a way to see it. In the context of the war in Ukraine, it gives us hope that not everything that comes out of war is suffering and rubble.

RG CANTALUPO (ROSS CANTON) WAS AN RTO (RADIO OPERATOR) FOR AN INFANTRY COMPANY IN THE 25TH INFANTRY DIVISION, 1968-69. HE WAS AWARDED THREE PURPLE HEARTS AND A BRONZE STAR WITH A COMBAT V FOR VALOR FOR COURAGE UNDER FIRE.


THE OXY-MO-RON
THE SMART Bomb
Hi Ya Kids! I'm a Really Smart Bomb!
NO LIVES MATTER!
WE'RE BOMBS!
WE DON'T DISCRIMINATE!
ABRAHAM LINCOLN, THE 1ST ANTISLAVERY PRESIDENT, WAS ELECTED 11/6/1860...
THE 1ST STATE SECEDED ONLY 44 DAYS LATER
THE 4-YEAR 27-DAY CIVIL WAR FOLLOWS!
1865
THE 13TH AMENDMENT ABOLISHES SLAVERY IN THE US,
BUT IT NEVER REALLY ENDS
THE "COMPANY STORE" & ETERNAL DEBT ARE FAR MORE PRACTICAL.
..LOAD 16 TONS...
CEO'S, POLITICIANS, DEGREE PROGRAMS & SYSTEMIC INJUSTICE ARE OUR NEW MASTERS.
WHY DO YOU THINK THEY CALL IT MASTER CARD?
CRUSHING DEBT = INDENTURED SERVITUDE
©2022 Billy X

Comments or suggestions? Contact Billy at billyx.net@gmail.com or visit him online at www.billyx.net.

I am indebted to TN Ernie Ford for tweaking my curiosity. He taught me, as a 7-year old, something about "the company store," indentured servitude and injustice with his 1955 hit "Sixteen Tons." We can thank his friend and a miner's son, Merle Travis, for those lyrics.

"You load 16 tons, what do you get?
Another day older and deeper in debt
St. Peter, don't you call me 'cause I can't go
I owe my soul to the company store"

It's available on YouTube.

Cheers,

Billy X

THE VETERAN
SECTION D
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Remembering Cody Camacho

Jeri Reed

I wanted to write an article for *The Veteran* about my son, Cody Camacho, to let those who knew him know about his death—and issues with the care (or lack of it) for PTSD he received from the Veterans Administration—in particular the "off label" use of antipsychotics that have serious side effects including increased anxiety and suicidal thinking. We feel these drugs contributed to his suicide on November 2, 2021, at the age of 39.

Cody joined the Army straight out of high school in 2000, was trained as a communications specialist, spent three years in Germany, then deployed to Iraq at the beginning of the invasion in 2003, what was to be his last year of active duty. For over six months of the year, Cody was in Iraq, he was based at the Abu Ghraib prison. He was there during the time that the famous torture pictures were taken, although like most, Cody lived outside on the grounds. The buildings were not really used, except by torturers. Cody left Iraq in March 2004, around the time that the Abu Ghraib torture hit the news. In addition, to the experiences commonly associated with PTSD, Cody had the additional problems I have noticed in others who were based at correctional facilities—and in his case, a great shame at being connected to a notorious prison where documented, widely publicized acts of torture took place. He did not want to walk the streets of Germany in his uniform.

He called me from Germany to tell me he was coming stateside to visit, and that he wanted to talk to the media. Even before the war started, I joined Military Families Speak Out and had been pretty active. Cody did not agree with the war either. I went to Germany two weeks before he deployed, and tried to help him find a way not to go. He told me: "They are going to send us into Iraq and do horrible things to the people there, and we will be blamed for it." Now, he had things that he wanted Americans to know—that he thought that he and thousands of other soldiers were kept in Iraq because the contractors like Halliburton were making so much money. No soldiers deployed, no more money. Since Cody was still on active duty, this was a big decision. He was among the first large wave of Army soldiers to leave Iraq; we did not know what the consequences could be. But two radio shows were set up, *Democracy Now* and *Counterpoint*. I searched these old shows out, wanting to hear his voice in my grief. You can listen to young Cody fresh out of Iraq on *Democracy Now*—March 19, 2004, exactly one year after the start of the war.

If you met Cody, it would likely have been at Camp Casey, at an event in DC, or a stop on the Bring Them Home Now tour. Before he left for Iraq, he was married to a German—this was not to last, she was unprepared for what lay in store when he returned, and when the marriage broke down, he came back to the states and contributed to anti-war activities from Fall 2004 until January 2006 when he returned to Germany. He met many Vietnam vets during his travels who were very important to him, who helped him as he first came to terms with the reality of war and PTSD. You may not have heard from Cody for years, but trust me, he thought of you often. He was grateful for the help he received from those who had been down the same ugly road. Truth be told, when he first went to Camp Casey, he was in the absolute depths of PTSD, was not sure what was going on, but had the irrational idea that a ticket from Chicago to Crawford, TX would get him closer to Ft. Bliss in El Paso where a friend was stationed—he was desperate to be with those he deployed with, thinking no one else would understand. He never made it to Ft. Bliss, but the many VVAW members who passed through Crawford listened to him and did understand, and he never forgot who helped him take that first step forward.

In 2006, Cody decided to try to reunite with his wife in Germany. He had not been able to adjust here; he could not do all the steps it took to get a job, even though he had worked since he was twelve. He had no money and was tired of drifting. Once in Germany, he went back to the Army as a civilian worker, for many years he worked various human resources jobs for the Army at different bases in Germany, with a close to two-year stretch in Kuwait.

The relationship with his German wife did not last, and while he was in Kuwait, he reconnected with his childhood sweetheart from day camp, my beloved daughter-in-law Chyla, the mother of his daughters Desiree and Calina, who all miss him so much. He returned to the US and worked as the administrator for Army reserve units in Illinois, with a three-year stint in K-Town. In total, Cody spent about 16 years with the Army. It was not so much love for the Army as that it helped him function, something he did not find in civilian settings—he was always around people who would understand. Upon returning from Germany in 2014, with his second daughter born shortly afterward, he and Chyla bought a home in Des Plaines, IL. He was so proud he was able to do this. He also began counseling through the VA in earnest. He had flirted with the VA early on but was reluctant due to the bureaucracy and their fondness for drugs. He also did not want the paperwork on him to exist, he did not want the stigma of being a disturbed veteran. This bothered him.

He decided it was time to step away from the Army. He looked for another federal job and was hired by FEMA with disabled veteran status. He thought he would be helping people in the field and went to their training camp, but found himself instead in a stressful office setting with the kind of internal politics that you find in government jobs—he was miserable in that job but felt he needed to keep it. Without going into too much detail, in Cody's words, they hired him as a disabled vet then fired him for his disability. A complaint by another employee that Cody made her feel threatened due to some things on his Facebook page she had seen—which I would call unwise and juvenile but hardly threatening—led to close to two years on paid administrative leave, then termination after finally getting a required psychiatric evaluation by a contract psychiatrist who met with him for one hour and ruled him "unable to be rehabilitated." His intended reintegration with a civilian job had not turned out well.

When this first happened, I was so worried. It was such a blow to Cody, he was so embarrassed and hurt to be considered a disturbed vet who might be threatening, to be investigated in this manner. But instead, Cody blossomed. He was so depressed going into that job every day, and it was like a weight lifted. He began going to various group sessions at the Hines VA two to three days a week, joined the Des Plaines American Legion, and through that became involved with other community activities. For the few years before his death, Cody was doing well and spending most of his time in service to others and caring for his family. He became active with a back-to-work veterans program in Des Plaines. He revived the American Legion chapter, mainly made up of veterans of Korea and Vietnam who were much older. He helped many of them deal with their own PTSD, to get benefits they had never even applied for. Despite the differences in political opinions, Cody became very important to them, serving as Vice Commander at the time of his death. He was working with others to try to get a veterans service office connected with the City of Des Plaines

Cody Camacho, Brooklyn, New York - Bring Them Home Now Tour, 2005.

I last saw Cody in August 2021. We had not seen each other since 2019. Cody built a nice patio during the pandemic—his yard borders on a beautiful park, right next to a naturalized pond with geese and ducks; it is such a peaceful place. We sat out there together and talked, at night with a fire. When I think of him now that's where we are. He was doing so well. Usually, when I visited, there would be at least one PTSD blow-up; this time there were none.

About a month later, Cody began having symptoms, anxiety, and a sense of being threatened by things that were not really threats. In conversations, he would start with something or someone that was bothering him, which at first seemed normal, then go off into detailed descriptions of how this was a threat to him or his family. He was worried that rather than just PTSD, he had some more serious mental illness and said he could not control his thoughts. He told his therapist at Hines he was not sure he knew what was real and what was not. This had happened before, I told him that if he wasn't in touch with reality he would not know it, and would not be able to recount his symptoms to me.

The types of things that personnel at the VA write in charts or say to veterans in their care, like the notorious schizoid-effective disorder diagnosis, play into this fear that many have of other mental illnesses. In all truth, this began at a time when the girls were back in class after online schooling for over a year, and Chyla who has her own business doing hair and make-up for weddings was working more. And Cody wasn't working, he now had too much time on his hands and too much time to think. I encouraged him to find things to do and to make sure to talk to his therapist to straighten out his thinking.

The crisis began in earnest in mid-September, when a friend from the Legion, a Vietnam vet who is a retired cop and has much experience dealing with both the VA and mental health crises, took him to the Hines VA emergency room because of his extreme anxiety and things he was saying that did not make sense. This friend expected them to admit Cody, but instead, he reports that the visit took only about half an hour. Cody said that he was given a shot of aripiprazole, an antipsychotic commonly known by its brand name, Abilify. He then was released to go home.

This appears to be the first time he was given antipsychotics. In later conversations, he seemed to be doing better, although still having symptoms. The last time I talked to him was a little over a week before his death. He had been out with a good friend with whom he had planned to open a business before the pandemic, and talked of working with this friend in a restaurant he managed, and how he was going to try to get his oldest daughter Desi in a fancy arts high school in Chicago. He sounded better, and he was doing the things he needed to do to manage his symptoms. He also mentioned that his psychiatrist at the VA changed his medication. After his death, I learned that this was risperidone, a more powerful antipsychotic with a black box warning about suicidal thinking. I told Cody I did not think he should be taking antipsychotics—he had always refused them before. He just said that he was not going to take them very long.

On November 1, Cody bought his children McDonald's for dinner, called his wife at work and told her he fed them, then left the house never to

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Remembering Cody Camcho

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return. At some point, he took a gun and went to a hotel room.

I left for Chicago after learning of his death the next day. Cody's funeral was huge and uplifting, and befitting the kind of person he was, all kinds of people were there. It was sad because he was not there to see how loved he was. During the week before and after the funeral, his house was full of people, many good friends who had known him for 20 or 30 years, many who reported talking to him during the last week of his life and how strange his behavior was. He told people he was marked, that people were after him, and other things that made no sense. During the time that he was taking this new antipsychotic, risperidone—seven pills, we found the bottle and counted—his behavior changed and then we lost him for good. Cody had never been suicidal, he was a resilient person with strong ties to his family and many other people. We believe that the risperidone contributed greatly to this outcome.

Two days after the funeral, Chyla and I went to Hines to talk to his therapist. I just kept having this idea, as what happened with Cody during that last week became clear to us, that I would like to tell his therapist what we think happened. When I talked with him on the phone the night before, the first thing he said was "I was so shocked. Cody was doing so well." I believe that he learned of Cody's death because the VA psychologist he had referred Cody to for more advanced cognitive therapy—which is what he really needed—called Chyla the day after the funeral when he could not reach Cody to set up an appointment. By then it was too late. When we got to his office, there was a woman there, the person in charge of the Hines suicide prevention program, someone who did not know Cody at all, and I am not sure why she was there other than to give us brochures.

She started off controlling the conversation, but mostly Chyla and I expressed our belief that the antipsychotics Cody was prescribed played a large part in his drastic change in behavior and his death, and that we did not believe he was suicidal at any time before beginning these drugs. As we were leaving, the woman said something like "You can never know what is in someone else's mind" and "He planned this. You just have to accept it." It was clear to me that she considered this over, and that we should just move on with our lives. I find it quite disturbing that the person who is charged with suicide prevention at Hines did not see it as important to look into why this happened, especially since he was under their care and had recently been prescribed drugs by them. It was as if he was just another veteran, and veterans commit suicide, end of story.

Chyla, Cody, Desiree, and Calina - Christmas 2020.

Cody Camacho.

We will never really understand what happened to Cody. It all happened so fast. It was as if he was deep in the midst of activity and life then suddenly was gone. Right now, I am exploring ways to hold the Veterans Administration accountable, particularly their use of these "off-label" drugs with serious side effects, rather than the real help that veterans need in times of crisis. This is not a new issue, there are countless congressional hearings.

It is hard to know where to start. I am researching, writing letters to key congress people, and above all looking for other cases either of veteran suicide while under the care of the VA, or experience with antipsychotic drugs used to treat PTSD. One thing that has become clear so far is that once a veteran dies by suicide they become nameless and faceless statistics. Of the many who die each day, it is difficult to find even news reports with much detail or even a name. What is needed is not just the general statistics, but the details of the care provided. People can look at Cody's face and know what happened to him. Please keep this in mind. If you know of other cases that might be helpful, or want to share your own experience, or just want to write, you can reach me at ForCody1982@gmail.com.

Jeri L. Reed lives in Oklahoma and teaches history at Oklahoma City Community College. She raised four sons in Chicago—two of them Iraq War veterans.

Nothing Left
To Drag Home

The Siege of Lao Bao During Operation Dewey Canyon II
As Written by an Artilleryman Who Survived It

By Gary Rafferty

Introduction by Seth Jacobs

"Once I started reading, I could not put the book down. And then I read it again. One gets the impression that this book has been a lifetime in the making. It's a beautiful little gem."
—W.D. Ehrhart, author of Vietnam-Perkasie

"Mr. Rafferty tells the raw truth about how the war changed the lives of many American soldiers, forever, and how forgetting was never an option."
—Bruce Weigl, author of Song of Napalm

Available on Amazon

Prisoner of War

The night terrors ended—one night, or
maybe over many nights—bleeding out

till there was nothing left but fragments
like the shrapnel that kept rising to the

surface of my skin. Even the names—Lonny,
Devil, Spike, Lee—faded into echoes, and

then were gone. I pressed them onto rice
paper at The Wall once, and put them between

the pages of a book like dead flowers, but
they're gone too, lost, along with the book,

sometime during the days when I kept moving
to forget where I'd been. Fifty years, and all

that's left to haunt me are these useless
medals I've kept. I found them in a box

with some old photographs—Janice, my
sixteen-year-old wife, in a wedding dress,

me, in my Advanced-Infantry-Training
graduation greens, and these dog tags

I hold—name, rank, and serial number—
as if there were always another self,

a prisoner of war living inside my closet
waiting, ever waiting to be freed.

—rg cantalupo

Jeff Stone: May 25, 1946 - March 8, 2022

Jim Smith

I first met Carole Landon and Jeffrey Stone in the early 70s in Venice. We lived about a half-block apart on Horizon Ave., one of the funkiest streets in this Beat/Hip/Bohemian town. The four of us, including my partner, Linda Amezquita, bonded immediately. We always did things together—go to the beach (a block away) for the sunset, haunt a cool breakfast joint, go to big anti-war marches in LA, and lots of "evenings of smoke and wine," as the Jackson Browne song puts it.

We formed the Venice Chapter of Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW), in which we insisted women would have equal rights. This was the idea behind the Winter Soldier Organization (VVAW-WSO), and we were happy to implement it. The army vets were men, but we couldn't have accomplished half the work we did without the women members of the chapter. They held up half the sky and half the chapter. We recruited Ron Kovic to our chapter, worked with Tom Hayden, and became nationally known in VVAW thanks in large part to Jeffrey's great work.

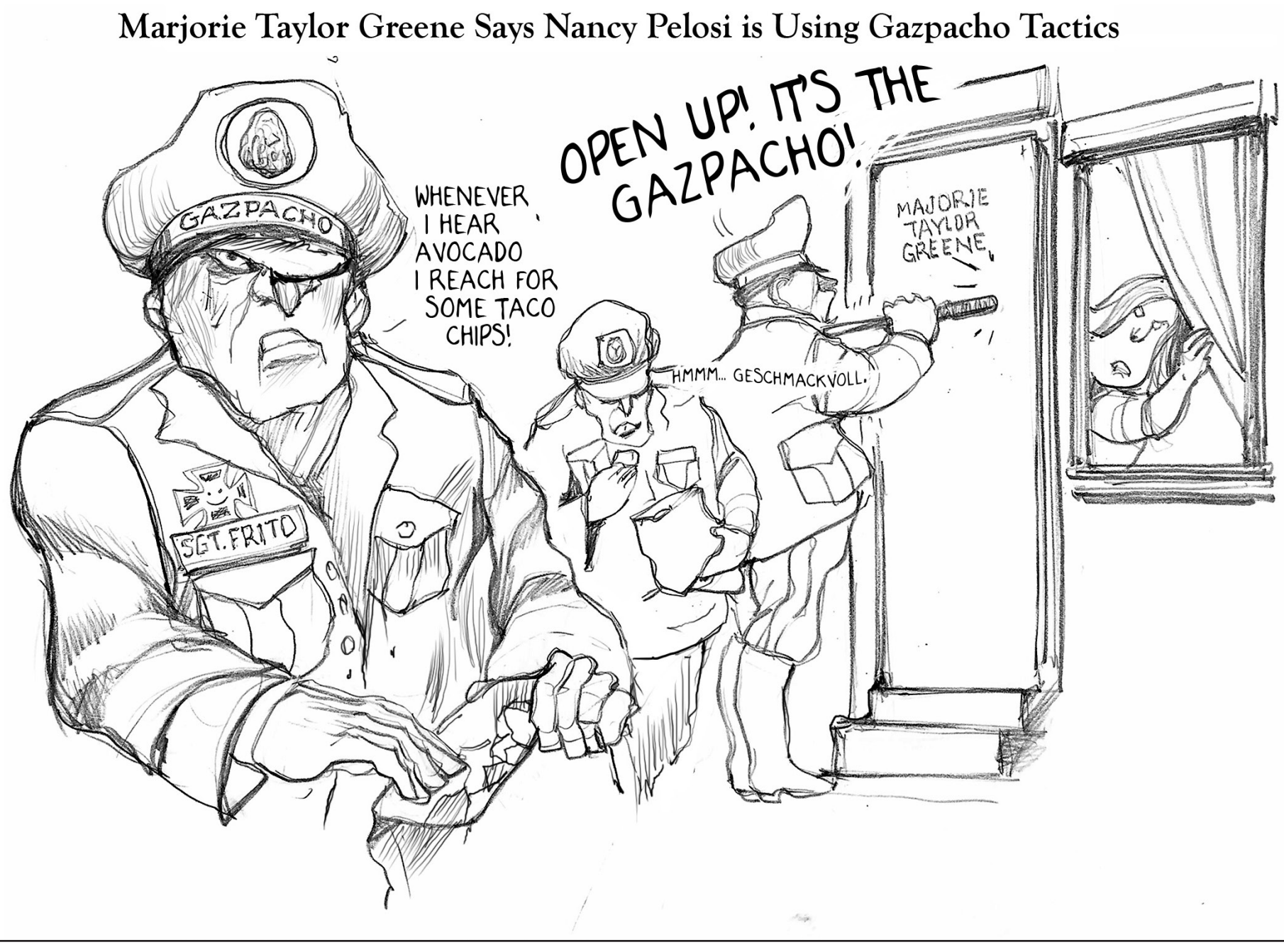
Carole was always part of whatever Jeffrey was doing. I think they communicated telepathically. Unlike most of the couples du jour, it was obvious even then that Carole and Jeffrey were in for the long haul, and so they were. C & J were already a couple when we met, around 1973, and remained one until his dying breath.

All good things have to come to an end. Anti-war activity slowed down, and Carole and Jeffrey moved to what became their home for nearly 50 years in Ocean Beach, the funky beach town in San Diego, CA. I was sorry to see them leave Venice, but in retrospect, they had an excellent life in a loving community. And for Carole, the adventure continues. Thanks to both of you for letting me share some of your inspiration.

Jeffrey's final statement of his commitment to a better world was dying on International Women's Day, March 8, 2022. He was 75 and died of hepatitis.

Jeff Stone.

Marjorie Taylor Greene Says Nancy Pelosi is Using Gazpacho Tactics



In Remembrance and Regret

Art Dorland

Memorial Day, 2005.

The following brief address was spoken at the Soldiers and Sailors Monument, Downtown Cleveland, Ohio seventeen years ago.

My name is Art Dorland. I am a US Navy veteran 1964-1967, stationed one year in Vietnam, comfortably outside the zone of real combat.

I am also a member of Veterans for Peace and a co-chair of the Veterans for Peace Iraq Water Project. Our project, formed in 1999, has helped repair six water treatment plants in various parts of Iraq. Our last project plant, repaired twice, in 2002 and 2004, is at Fallujah. I can tell you that I went to Falluja in a Veterans for Peace delegation before the war began, and it was not our intention to light the way into that city for the thousands of US armed invaders and gigantic quantities of massed armor that came months later.

We, the people of the United States, owe the people of Falluja a city. We, the people of the United States, owe the people of the world a convincing justification for what we have done to Fallujah, and too much of the rest of Iraq. So far, we have not provided this justification. Some of what we have done has been perhaps marginally good, but not good enough to blot out the evil we have done.

The arrogant package of pretexts our country used to justify this invasion, this occupation, this war, was wrapped in gaudy colors of patriotism and fear and bound up in ribbons of sand. The package has fallen apart and ought to be discarded. The contents are not what we were led to expect. Maybe the whole mess can be swept up and mailed back to the sender, at least in 2008.

In the meantime, on this Memorial Day, let us lift our thoughts and feelings to the families and survivors of all those who have perished on either side of the fighting, or had their lives wrecked by this grand error of judgment. Let us be mindful, too, that people who still support this war—again, on either side—have the same right to mourn the dead this day that we claim. Death is the great leveler: the dead pacifist and the dead aggressor are both, and equally, dead. Whether in Iraq, or Vietnam, or Flanders Fields, those dead people will always breathe a message, simple and brief, to the ones left here in the turmoil of a busy and sometimes thoughtless life: Remember Me.

Art Dorland, petty officer third class, US Naval Support Activity Saigon, 1966-67.

Women Vietnam Veterans

Ed White (reviewer)

Women Vietnam Veterans: Our Untold Stories
by Donna Lowery
(Author House, 2015)

This is truly an untold story. There have been books written about women in Vietnam: *Sisterhood of War*, by Dr. Kim Heikkila, relating about the 6,000 American nurses who served in Vietnam; *Courageous Women of the Vietnam War*, by Kathryn Atwood, a broad historian's view of the history of female involvement from 1945; and others that focus on the trauma undergone by nurses in hospitals all over Vietnam during the war. *Women Vietnam Veterans* by author Donna Lowery describes the clerk-typists, stenographers, intelligence analysts, translators, communication technicians, supply specialists, doctors, medical record clerks, lab technicians, dietitians and, physical therapists. Wow! Who knew?

Two women: Precilla Landry Wilkewitz and Claire Brisebois Starnes served in Vietnam and formed a non-profit group called Vietnam Women Veterans, Inc. They asked Donna Lowery to compile the research together in a book form. How difficult is that? The women first got together at the gates of the Arlington Cemetery at a dedication of Women in Military Service for America (WIMSA), in 1997. Then, in 1999, in Olympia, WA, they met as Vietnam Women Veterans (VWV). In the long road to publication, the "search and find" process started. Yes, the internet was alive and primitive at that time. They were aided by conferences and received help from many women throughout the world. The Pentagon suggested there were 1,000 women with orders to Vietnam. What an amazing, untold story!

The resulting book, 733 pages, and 21 chapters offer us charts, jargon, history, photos, names with rank and positions, and numerous stories about their experiences. There are multiple sections with names and data telling the story. The effort was huge and continues with sites to contact.

The uniqueness of the book can be found in chapters 4 through 12. They are titled years, i.e., 1962 to 1972. In these chapters by year, we see photographs, when available, of the military women with their names, with nicknames, when they served in-country, their rank, and their duty station. Also included are stories about their service, if they wanted to tell them.

For example, Judy Ann Jacque was a Staff Sergeant serving from January 1968 until February 1969 in G3 Classified Documents. When landed, she was transported in the usual buses with wire around the windows and taken to a compound with barbed wire. That night, a nearby ammo dump was attacked resulting in her taking cover under her bed. Her assignment required 12-hour shifts 7 days a week. Her eating habits consisted of heating canned food cooked on a sterno stove. When she returned home, the military advised her not to wear her uniform in public places.

AND NOW FOR BREAKING NEWS: Why were military women in Vietnam in the first place, you ask? Major Anne Marie Doering arrived in Vietnam in 1962. She was the first WAC (Women's Army Corps) to serve in Vietnam. General William Westmoreland in 1964 approved two positions for WAC Advisors to the Women's Armed Forces Corps. Initially, Westmoreland wanted more administrative staff, but it turned into a request from the South Vietnamese government to assist in the training and organizing of Vietnamese women. A new twist of democracy-building?

What I love is the requirements: "The WAC officer should be a captain or major, fully knowledgeable in all matters pertaining to the operation of a WAC school and the training conducted therein. She should be extremely intelligent, an extrovert and beautiful. The WAC sergeant should have somewhat the same qualities… and should be able to type as well." Goes without saying… Also, apparently, all the military services were asked to contribute women personnel.

Mary Marsh was a Captain in the Air Force in 1968 and retired as a Brigadier General. She also had to be qualified on weapons as a basic requirement. As an advisor, Marsh "assisted" in building the VNAF (Vietnamese National Air Force) Component of the Armed Forces. She traveled all over South Vietnam with the Vietnamese Air Force. She established standard administrative and personnel procedures, designed the uniforms and pushed for them to wear shoes. She was in Vietnam from April 1968 until April 1969.

The last example of women in the Vietnam war is Joan Mae Crawford (Blakeley), who served in Vietnam as a Chief Warrant Officer 3 in the Army. She served in the 1st Signal Brigade, Cryptographic Custodian for the Communications Center. Crawford went through mortar attacks on the compound, enemy fire, and exposure to Agent Orange. After 22 years of service, her decorations include the Bronze Star Medal, Meritorious Service Medal, and the Army Commendation Medal with two oak leaf clusters.

This review is only the tip of the iceberg of a vast amount of history and information. The book includes conference photos of reunions, songs and poems, service info on where to get more further personal history, and of course the consequences of war on women. Yes, they were not recognized by the Veterans Administration for benefits. The stories and the interviews of the women make this book critical in understanding their involvement and our debt to them.

Ed White is a Marine Vietnam combat vet with memberships in VVAW, VFP, and VVA. He has taught courses on the Vietnam War at Triton College in Illinois.

An Army of One

Do you hear the dead complaining?
Killing is easy –
it don't mean shit.

What's that look for?

You think I should be touched by
the death of mother/brother/son/daughter/uncle/father/child?

The only touch I feel is
the half ounce of pressure on the trigger –
then
I get to be
all I can be.

—Larry Kerschner

Bastion

This evening, someplace else,
soldiers die (the lucky ones).
Those less fortunate,
whose bodies lie mangled,
writhe in mud or sand,
until no longer able to scream
disbelief and pleas for mercy.

They exhale one last time
as the sheen in their eyes
fades to dull glass,
and the process of slowly
being forgotten begins.

On this side of the line, we sit
and sip coffee as we read
how the neighbor's son
has made the list.

More cream, dear?

—Tony Marconi

It's Not Easy Being a Republican Congressman These Days

SO SORRY I WON'T BE ABLE TO HELP WITH YOUR RE-ELECTION CAMPAIGN. MY BANK ACCOUNT HAS BEEN FROZEN AND THEY ARE STEALING MY BOAT. BUT BEST OF LUCK, AND DO STOP IN NEXT TIME YOU'RE IN MOSCOW.
YOURS TRULY, VLADIMIR (THE TERRIBLE)
HERO
TRUMP 2024
PENCE
CONGRESSMAN SCHIN
Mar 7 2022 (9784)
DANZIGER
The Rutland Herald
Washington Post Writers Group

The Cost of Loyalty

John Ketwig (reviewer)

The Cost of Loyalty: Dishonesty, Hubris, and Failure in the US Military
by Tim Bakken
(Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020)

When I was a boy, I read about West Point. Being young, I was impressed by the photos of the dress marches, the perfect rows of rigid young men in formations, everything gleaming and immaculate. I guess my fascination came up in a conversation with my uncle, who told me his father owned a textile company that made blankets for the academy, and soon after, gifted me a genuine West Point blanket. Of course, it was gray, with stripes of gold and black, and a formal USMA printed toward the bottom. I was thrilled, and I kept that blanket until just a few years ago, when it became too ragged to serve any purpose. My admiration for West Point, and all of America's military academies, I'm sorry to say, had long since turned to disgust and loathing. I spent a little less than three years in the army, one of them in Vietnam, and I saw too many lieutenants fresh out of West Point with their arrogance and disdain for the men under their command, far more evident than that of officers who had earned their rank in Officers Candidate Schools. To this day, I have little respect for any of them.

Thirteen years after I left Vietnam, and twelve years after I found that my reassignment to peaceful Thailand included covert forays into an incredible battlefield I believe to be Laos, I found a Saturday evening TV broadcast titled "The Uncounted Enemy" that revealed that General Westmoreland, commander of all U.S. forces in Vietnam, had, in 1967, ordered that reports of enemy troop strengths going back to Washington not exceed a given number despite the obvious intelligence reports and observations that there were far, far more enemy soldiers with their weapons aimed at us. Yes, us! In late 1967 and early '68, I was a Pfc truck mechanic and driver based in a compound near Pleiku, South Vietnam. On the evening of January 30th, 1968, the enemy sprung a surprise attack throughout South Vietnam, the Tet offensive. Westmoreland had recently told Congress that the war in Vietnam was nearly won, and he could "see the light at the end of the tunnel." Our leadership eagerly passed on his message to us. If I remember correctly, Westmoreland limited his officers to reports of 350,000 enemy max, while it was clear there were more than 600,000 enemy facing us. Many of his officers and intelligence people were concerned, as every aspect of our war-fighting preparation and supply was governed by those reports. In November of '67, many of us had been recruited to haul supplies, especially ammunition, to Dak To, where the 173rd Airborne was engaged in the biggest battle of the war so far, reacting when it was discovered that a huge influx of North Vietnamese regulars had jumped off the Ho Chi Minh trail to threaten the Central Highlands. And then the Tet offensive exploded, devastating every aspect of Westmoreland's misguided battle plans. He rushed back to Washington to ask President Johnson for permission to use nuclear weapons, and thank God, LBJ denied him. Within a few months, Westmoreland was reassigned back to a stateside position, but now everyone knew the war was unwinnable. Profiteers throughout the military-industrial complex kept it going for six more years, in open defiance of the will of the American people.

After watching "The Uncounted Enemy" that Saturday evening, I knew I had to deal with my Vietnam experiences. Long story short, I wrote a long and very descriptive outpouring to my wife, typing alone in the living room night after night for nine months. That outpouring ultimately became a book. All of this is relevant to my review of Mr. Bakken's book only because my literary agent also represented another writer who lived a couple miles from me. Bruce Galloway had been an intelligence analyst and operations officer in 1967 and '68. His co-author, one Robert B. Johnson, Jr., had graduated from West Point in 1965 and served as a captain in the infantry in Vietnam from March, 1968 to March of 1969, almost certainly assigned to the war zone in the immediate aftermath of the Tet offensive. Bruce Galloway was my neighbor, and I never met Johnson. The book was titled *West Point: America's Power Fraternity*, published in 1973 by Simon & Schuster. Neither Bruce Galloway, Bob Johnson, nor the book *West Point* are mentioned in Tim Bakken's book, and he may not even be aware of them.

In his foreword to *West Point*, Lt. Colonel Anthony B. Herbert (ret), author of *Soldier*, writes: "Bob Johnson and Bruce Galloway present a theory backed with impressive, instructive factual data. And if they are correct, then someone somewhere is to blame—and that someone, contrary to what our so-called leaders are expounding today, is not the American people! The people are not to blame! …The responsibility for the tragedy of Vietnam is clearly established. It is imperative to all that we understand why we lost and then make the necessary corrections before it is too late. Vietnam was no accident of fate, but rather the goal toward which our army had been doggedly headed for years. And now the line is drawn; the professional officer corps, the "clique," must accept responsibility for the major role it played. And we must accept the responsibility for that which we permit to be done without protest, and therefore in effect condone, for as citizens in a democracy we must bear the burden for that which is done in our name… Bob Johnson and Bruce Galloway… have, in effect, got the ball rolling. It is now our turn—to read, to think, and then to act. The time is short!" Again, this book came out in 1973!

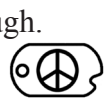
These two books, published 47 years apart, are arranged to sit side-by-side on my bookshelf. They are of one voice, although Galloway and Johnson use the word "aristocracy" more than Bakken. They point out that Representative David Crockett of Tennessee, introduced to Congress on February 25, 1830, a House Resolution No. 7 of the 21st Congress, suggesting that the US Military Academy at West Point "be abolished, and the appropriations annually made for its support be discontinued." Among his reasons, he argued "That each and every institution, calculated, at public expense, and under the patronage and sanction of the Government, to grant exclusive privileges except in consideration of public services, is not only aristocratic, but a downright invasion of the rights of the citizen, and a violation of the civil compact called "the constitution."

Davy Crockett was a famed pioneer and hunter who would die at the Alamo. In Vietnam in 1968, and even more today, his concerns have come to be our sad and threatening reality. Military officers, and I will mention incompetent, publicity-hungry Generals Petraeus and McChrystal as examples, have become a dangerous aristocracy. Tim Bakken writes about the abuses of power evident in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. As veterans, I suppose we all have our experiences, stories and personal observations. The aristocracy of American military officers is well established, and as sacred as it is deadly.

In the Spring 2020 issue of *The Veteran*, Ed White did a wonderful review of Tim Bakken's book. Ed repeatedly calls *The Cost of Loyalty* "devastating," and it is a very fair assessment. Ed suggests "This is a book that needs to be read by all Americans." I am adding this review to echo and draw attention to his very appropriate words.

Author Tim Bakken is the first civilian promoted to professor of law in West Point's history. He became a federal whistleblower after reporting what he believed was corruption at West Point and, after the army retaliated against him, became one of the few federal employees to win a retaliation case against the US military. He is still teaching at West Point. After reading his book, you will take hope from that statement.

This is the most powerful, realistic, and important book I've read in thirty years. I cannot recommend it strongly enough.



John Ketwig is a lifetime member of VVAW, and the author of two books about the Vietnam War.

The Return

Gary Rafferty

I spent '70-'71 in Vietnam in artillery and survived the siege of Lao Bao during Operation Dewey Canyon II. The ARVN called it Lam Son 719. Better known as the Laos Incursion, it was the last major ground offensive of the war involving US troops. You may recall how the American-backed ARVN dashed into Laos and were crushed by the NVA.

I left Vietnam on Good Friday and was home for Easter. As a Catholic, I pondered the irony. I hadn't called ahead and when I knocked on the door late that night my parents were terrified. But when they opened the door, instead of a military officer sent to notify them I'd been killed, they found what was left of me.

My father was proud of my service. Somehow my mother knew that my last months in Vietnam were awful and that I was changed, but she was thrilled that her only son had returned home.

A few weeks later, when the last of my army pay was gone, I applied for unemployment, filling out the forms as best I could. What was my last job? US Army, Vietnam. Why did I leave? Rotten pay. Hazardous conditions. What did that previous job qualify me to do? Read maps and plot artillery on people trying to kill me. Would my answers offend those who read them? I hoped so, but the clerk was not amused. My Army skills were not suited to civilian life, she said. Silently, I screamed, "No shit, Sherlock!" I was officially categorized as "miscellaneous."

Jobless, I contented myself doing as little as possible while collecting $55.00 a week. Four times a month I lied to the clerk, telling her where I'd sought employment. One fateful day, after I turned in my list of lies, instead of a check, I was given a blood-red index card.

What was my last job? US Army, Vietnam. Why did I leave? Rotten pay. Hazardous conditions. What did that previous job qualify me to do? Read maps and plot artillery on people trying to kill me.

"You have to go there and apply for a job," said the clerk, smirking. "If you don't get the foreman to sign the card and bring it back to me, I'll terminate your checks."

On the card was written the name and address of my future employer. Was this a plot to deprive me of my weekly benefit? To find out, a few days later I drove to the innocuous-sounding Salem Woodworking, in Salem, New Hampshire.

The receptionist took the crimson card and paged the foreman. Covered in wood dust, a grizzled man wearing overalls and a blue work shirt looked me over. I had on my army field jacket. My hair was wild, dirty. My attitude was not pleasant.

"You don't want to work here," the foreman said. I was stunned but convinced that he was playing his part to stop my checks.

"Did you just get back from Vietnam?" he asked.

"Yes," I said.

"Do you know what we make here?"

"No. I don't."

"Caskets," he said. "We make caskets."

I was shocked. And angry.

Kindly, the foreman said, "I'll sign that card for you, son. Take it back and get your money. Those people are idiots."

Enraged, I drove to the unemployment office, parked my truck over the front curb, swung open the door, marched into the lobby, and screamed, "WHAT KIND OF FUCKING IDIOT SENDS A COMBAT VETERAN TO A CASKET FACTORY FOR A FUCKING JOB?!!"

A line of unemployed workers began clapping, yelling their support. Moments later the manager rushed to me, grabbed my arm, gently led me to his office, and apologized for the mistake. My country, I realized, had welcomed me home.

Gary Rafferty was in FDC with A Battery, 2nd/94th Artillery, 108th Field Artillery Group, XXIV Corp. This is an excerpt from his memoir "Nothing Left to Drag Home, the Siege of Lao Bao as Written by an Artilleryman Who Survived It." Now available on Amazon.

China Beach Surf Club - Part 1

JOSEPH GIANNINI

Off the Republic of South Vietnam
Onboard the USS Dulutt
September 12, 1967

Last night our Amphibious Assault Ships steamed into a large cove and dropped anchor outside China Beach, Da Nang. China Beach is an in-country R & R center run by the Navy. They even have surfboards, and a building groundswell is heading in. I first came here in early August, a little over a month back. We had a great party that day. At dusk, drunk and happy, we headed back to our ships. Got back on board without any mishaps. One day of rest and then we choppered back in-country to start Operation Beacon Guide in Hoi An, Happy Valley. From there on to Operation Cochise in the Que Son Valley—the Valley of the Walking Dead.

Later today, the First Battalion Third Marines, aka 1/3, the Home of the Brave—four rifle companies and a headquarters company, over 500 salty Marines in all—will head to China Beach for a beach party: beer, burgers, and franks.

I share a cabin with another second lieutenant, George Ford. I'm lying on my back in my bunk. Restless. It has to do with knowing there will be surf tomorrow. Summer is coming to an end, and I haven't surfed once. Started surfing at 18.

At 22, moments away from being drafted into the Army, two large Marines wearing Dress Blues walked into the induction room. "Listen up, one said and paused, we are looking for volunteers to join the finest fighting force in the world. The United States Marine Corps."

I was impressed. Marines have a great rep. Known to never leave anyone behind. I figured I was going to Vietnam. My chances of surviving would be better with Marines. Also, Marines would be around water. Waves. I'd be able to surf. I raised my hand.

I arrived in-country in early July 1967, via a Continental Airlines flight from Okinawa to Da Nang. On Okinawa, a Marine personnel officer told me that grunts in Nam have an 80 percent chance of getting hit. I'm an infantry officer—a grunt. I'd been hoping my chances were at least 50/50.

I had orders to join the First Battalion Third Marines. 1/3 was up North in Quang Tri Province just below the Demilitarized Zone. Two days later I choppered into the DMZ, also known as the Dead Marine Zone, to join 1/3.

I just missed a deadly encounter with a large North Vietnamese Army force: 1/3 had gone in to help the First Battalion Ninth Marines, who had walked into a large ambush in the DMZ 1/9 suffered terrible losses and many were missing, some feared captured. After that battle, 1/9 would be called the Walking Dead.

1/3 is part of a Special Landing Force of two battalions. We don't have a base in-country. We go in when and where we're needed, by chopper and by amphibious craft. I've had the First Platoon, Bravo One, Bravo Company, for two months now.

Back in August, when I first came ashore at China Beach, there were surfboards stacked against a small shack on the beach. There was a sign out front: China Beach Surf Club. The waves were small and there was an onshore breeze. After two burgers and several beers, I made for the surf shack. Walked up and told the attendant, "I'm taking a board."

His response: "You can't. You're not a member of the China Beach Surf Club. And you have to be assigned to China Beach to be a member."

"You mean you have to be a Squid to get a board? That's bullshit!" I thought, fuck this, the surf sucks anyhow. I turned away and headed back to my rowdy Marines.

The beach party turned out to be a hoot. Our beer ration in the field and on the ship was one can per month for each Marine. On China Beach, there was no limit. Every swinging dick got shitfaced.

Midday, a young, pretty round-eye wearing a tiny bikini joined us. I assumed she was an off-duty nurse. Some of these Marines hadn't seen a round-eye for as long as seven months. What a brave girl. I thought she might be in for trouble and stood by ready to help. But she was treated with respect.

Near the end of the party, Sergeant Strong punched our Executive Officer, Lieutenant Norris. When I stepped between them, Norris came at me, then backed off. Suddenly a mob of drunk, laughing Marines grabbed both of us, hoisted us in the air, carried us down to the ocean, and threw us in.

That first time, the waves sucked and my Marines got crazy drunk, needed some watching. Not getting a board wasn't a big deal. This time it's different. Tomorrow might be my last chance to surf this summer. Or ever. My right eyelid twitches.

The twitching started when Corporal Listorti was killed on August 12th. It got worse when his replacement, Corporal Calabria, was killed five days later, just three days after he joined my platoon. Both were M-60 machine gunners. Listorti was killed in Happy Valley. Calabria in the Valley of the Walking Dead. The twitch comes and goes intermittently. I've taken to wearing sunglasses, even in our cabin.

Surf Lesson
Rockaway Beach, NY
September 12, 1965

In my last semester at Hofstra University, I received a Draft Notice. Around the same time, my parents moved from Massapequa, Long Island, back to Brooklyn. I was living off-campus near Hofstra but soon joined them.

Rise in the dark for a Dawn Patrol. Hoping to surf, at Rockaway Beach, before making my first class at Hofstra. I've been going solo for a while. At 22, I'm fearless, invincible. Played some football, wrestled in high school and college, and worked out regularly. Been surfing four years. It was an addiction. A good one

I dress as quietly as possible, trying not to disturb my parents. Grab my Phil Edwards and head down to my Volvo P544. I've removed the back seat and kept the front passenger seat pushed forward. Open the trunk and slide the Edwards all the way in. Close and lock the trunk. No racks. No one has a clue I'm a surfer dude. Get in and start it up. Drive approximately 20 miles to 38th Street at Rockaway Beach.

I arrive just before dawn and park near the boardwalk. Walk up to take a look. It's a cool day with gray clouds hugging the horizon. Light offshore winds and waves that look 3 to 5 feet. Go back to the Volvo, undress, and suit up in a diving bottom and diving top. The top has a beavertail with buckles and zips up the front. Pull out my board. Close the trunk. Wax up and head for the water.

The beach is deserted as I walk up to the waterline. I'm midway between two large jetties. Each is about 15 feet high and approximately 300 feet long. I wade in and start to paddle. The sun is coming up as I head out. The white water is about 2 feet and strong. I paddle straight out, catch a lull and make it outside with dry hair. I'm already past the jetties and waiting for a good wave.

A set approaches. I let the first three waves go under and paddle into the last and biggest. Jump up and turn right down a shoulder-high wall. Trim for a short distance. Then up the face a bit and turn back. Back to trim and up and over just before the wave breaks. Nice.

I paddle back out. I see a set way outside. It's a sweeper set. Point my board at the horizon and start stroking. I'll go over the first three waves and take the fourth. I've gone about 50 yards before I paddle up the face of the first wave. It's bigger than expected. I'm up and over and stroking strong for the second wave. Of course bigger. I go over and stroke for the third. Again bigger.

I'm at a 45-degree angle when I make it over and stroke for the last wave. It's bigger and walling up. I'm too far inside to turn and burn. I paddle into the trough and start up; go completely vertical before reaching the crest. Fuck, I can't punch through or make it over.

I lock my arms and legs around my board. Take a deep breath as I'm pitched backward over the falls. Hold on as the wave tumbles and drags me. White water so powerful I can't right myself and catch a good breath. When I finally do, I'm facing landward. But it's not land I see. It's huge boulders: I'm an arm's length from the end of one of the jetties.

I look back. Another set is approaching. I let go of the Edwards before it drags me into the jetty. Grab my zipper to strip off my top. Realize that's crazy.

Open my mouth to scream for help. But there's no one to scream to. Look back again.

The first wave is closing. Walling up. I dive to my right for the bottom. Deep into the dark. I'm calm. Feel the wave hit above. Tumble forward in the crashing water. Struggle up. Break through. Gasp for air. Another wave breaks and pushes me back under. I struggle to the surface, gasp again.

I'm taking in water. Coughing uncontrollably. Swept along the jetty as I swim for the shallows. Totally exhausted by the time my feet touch bottom. I wade forward, fall to my knees and hands, crawl slowly to the waterline. Collapse. Out of breath. Gasping, shaking. Finally, I catch my breath and rise slowly. Still unsteady, trembling. I look around for my board. It's on the jetty, about halfway out.

I make it to my first class, saltwater dripping from my nose. Hair full of sand.

"Joe, are you OK?" It's Vic Cardino. "You look terrible."

"I'm fine." But I'm not. I have a strange feeling in my gut. Unsettling. Fear: I'd met it out at the end of that jetty. I'm no longer fearless. Or invincible.

To be continued next issue.

JOSEPH GIANNINI, A LOCAL CRIMINAL DEFENSE ATTORNEY, SERVED IN VIETNAM FROM 1967 TO 1968 WITH THE FIRST BATTALION, THIRD MARINES. A VICTIM OF AGENT ORANGE, HE IS CURRENTLY WRITING A BOOK OF SHORT, NON-FICTION STORIES ABOUT FATE, SURFING, AND WAR.

Where We Came From, Who We Are, Who Can Join

Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc. (VVAW) is a national veterans' organization that was founded in New York City in 1967 after six Vietnam vets marched together in a peace demonstration. It was organized to voice the growing opposition among returning servicemen and women to the still-raging war in Indochina, and grew rapidly to a membership of over 30,000 throughout the United States, including active duty GIs stationed in Vietnam. Through ongoing actions and grassroots organization, VVAW exposed the ugly truth about US involvement in Southeast Asia and our first-hand experiences helped many other Americans to see the unjust nature of that war.

VVAW also took up the struggle for the rights and needs of veterans. In 1970, we began the first rap groups to deal with traumatic aftereffects of war, setting the example for readjustment counseling at vet centers today. We exposed the shameful neglect of many disabled vets in VA hospitals and helped draft legislation to improve educational benefits and create job programs. VVAW fought for amnesty for war resisters, including vets with bad discharges. We helped make known the negative health effects of exposure to chemical defoliants and the VA's attempts to cover up these conditions as well as their continued refusal to provide treatment and compensation for many Agent Orange victims.

Today our government still finances and arms undemocratic and repressive regimes around the world in the name of "democracy." American troops have again been sent into open battle in the Middle East and covert actions in Latin America, for many of the same misguided reasons that were used to send us to Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, many veterans from all eras are still denied justice—facing unemployment, discrimination, homelessness, post-traumatic stress disorder and other health problems, while already inadequate services are cut back or eliminated.

We believe that service to our country and communities did not end when we were discharged. We remain committed to the struggle for peace and for social and economic justice for all people. We will continue to oppose senseless military adventures and to teach the real lessons of the Vietnam War. We will do all we can to prevent future generations from being put through a similar tragedy, and we will continue to demand dignity and respect for veterans of all eras. This is real patriotism and we remain true to our mission. Anyone who supports this overall effort, whether Vietnam veteran or not, veteran or not, may join us in this long-term struggle. JOIN US!

created by Robert Spicher

Insignia of Vietnam Veterans Against the War

We took the MACV patch as our own, replacing the sword with the upside-down rifle with helmet, the international symbol of soldiers killed in action. This was done to expose the lies and hypocrisy of US aggression in Vietnam as well as its cost in human lives. The original MACV insignia also put forward lies. The US military was not protecting (the sword) the Vietnamese from invasion from the People's Republic of China (the China Gates), but was instead trying to "save" Vietnam from itself.

Our insignia has come to represent veterans fighting against new "adventures" like the Vietnam War, while at the same time fighting for a decent way of life for veterans and their families.

Our insignia is over 46 years old. The insignia, VVAW® and Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc.® are registered trademarks belonging to VVAW and no other organization or group may use it for any reason without written permission from the VVAW Board of Directors.

Beware of VVAW-AI

This notice is to alert you to a handful of individuals calling themselves the "Vietnam Veterans Against the War Anti-Imperialist" (VVAW-AI). VVAW-AI is actually the creation of an obscure ultraleft sect, designed to confuse people in order to associate themselves with VVAW's many years of activism and struggle. They are not a faction, caucus or part of VVAW, Inc. and are not affiliated with us in any way. We urge all people and organizations to beware of this bogus outfit.

SUPPORT VVAW!
DONATE OR JOIN TODAY!

Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc.
VVAW Membership
P.O. Box 355
Champaign, IL 61824-0355

Membership Application

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Phone _____
Email address _____
Branch _____
Dates of Service (if applicable) _____
Unit _____
Military Occupation _____
Rank _____
Overseas Duty _____
Dates _____

☐ Yes, add me to the VVAW email list.
☐ I do not wish to join, but wish to make a donation to the work of VVAW.
☐ Sign me up for a lifetime membership in VVAW. $250 is enclosed.

Membership in VVAW is open to ALL people who want to build a veterans' movement that fights for peace and justice and support the work of VVAW and its historic legacy. Most of our members are veterans of the Vietnam era, but we welcome veterans of all eras, as well as family members and friends to our ranks. The annual membership fee is $25.00 (not required of homeless, unemployed or incarcerated vets).

Signature _____

Date _____

Total Amount Enclosed _____

Make checks payable to VVAW. Contributions are tax-deductible.

Stage at Annie Bailey Memorial, Milwaukee, October 2021.

RECOLLECTIONS

1969, Vietnam: While Waiting For Nixon's Secret Plan

JOHN CRANDELL

A mission out west to LZ Meredeth had occurred from Fourth Division basecamp on August 29th. After riding fifteen miles out to an old French tea plantation known as Cateka, also the third brigade's field headquarters, we boarded a flock of Huey's accompanied by a twin-bladed Chinook. Sitting next to the floor hatch of the latter I gazed wide-eyed right between my boots, thousands of feet down into the headwaters of the Ia Drang watershed. The triple canopy was broken only by boiling red rivers carrying laterite soil in suspension, rapidly descending towards the distant Mekong. We hadn't anticipated having to spend the night there near the border and the animosity towards our motley collection of rear area commandos was distinctly felt.

The only structure of sorts was a heavily fortified command post at the center of the zone. Sleeping quarters for the infantry were fashioned out of half-sections of corrugated steel culverts buried beneath sandbags. Latrines, pissoirs and a shower were rudimentary in nature. One's ablutions were conducted in full view of the surrounding terrain and vice versa. An individual's privacy lay only where he slept. The experience was sobering—blank, somnambulant expressions on men's faces—gone past fear, past resolution or dependence or caring save for that hoped-for day of departure for another world.

As dusk fell into night and not knowing where we could go, I and the personnel specialist plus the finance specialist crawled under a tarp supposedly protecting food rations. Abandoned mosquito nets made for makeshift bedding. Rats didn't bother us but they climbed all over breakfast, lunch, and dinner supplies. Outgoing artillery erupted all night long a few hundred feet distant. Ears dented; the sonic impact far more extreme than back at Camp Enari. The nightly monsoon descended and at dawn, the place had become a more reflective hue of mahogany, surrounded by every shade of green known to mankind.

Come my twenty-first birthday I was on another mission, by land instead of air. Along a narrow road, we sailed southward through the highland jungle as fast as that deuce-in-a-half truck could fly, foliage snapping as we passed. And we found the perimeter at Plei Mei completely abandoned. Supposedly we were to rendezvous there with troops needing a money order, to mail a letter or submit paperwork. Not a military sound was heard. No one came for admin service. Sheer emptiness with three of us there alone at a guard post, the site of the siege of the Army's special forces camp four years earlier. Mud had risen near to our knees between truck and bunker. That was twelve miles east of Chu Pong Massif where the First Air Cav had encountered the first regiments of NVA regulars in the Battle of Ia Drang—the first incident of northern forces standing and fighting against Americans.

In recent years I've wondered whether or not the three of us had been specifically selected for treatment. All that we had for defense were our rifles. Was it intended that we sit there and contemplate our fate thoroughly exposed in distant isolation? Had there been a miscommunication—or had we been held as recalcitrants? Had command tried to tell us something that day?

Five-plus decades of life since then, the composted social tea of intervening years informs me that that day was not a military maneuver, that something larger was at issue, that all that we are told is not open to question, be it gossip, stereotype, meme, moral or social standard—that individualism only applies to appearance, to one's material and monetary acquisitions. Be accessible, relate, and get on board whatever realm one is surrounded by. To hell with the essential effect of the French Revolution. Now, to sit and watch a video of the storming of the US Capitol causes wonder over things having gone into reverse.

One does not at all recall that any of us three spoke to one another in those hours alone at a place once used by a very effective element of the American military. We were hollow young men. Yes, those years were the seeds of our present condition. Oh, what we supposedly did for our country and what our country folk are now doing to us all.

JOHN CRANDELL CLERKED UNDER THE CANTANKEROUS "SERGEANT LOONEY" WITH THE FOURTH ARMY POSTAL UNIT CIRCA 1969-70. LATELY, HE'S DISCOVERED THAT SEVERAL OF HIS ANCESTORS WERE AMONG THE REBEL BARONS WHO FORCED BLOODY KING JOHN TO ABIDE BY RIGHTS ESTABLISHED VIA MAGNA CARTA IN 1215. LOONEY WAS FAMOUS FOR SNIFFING OUT PORN AMONGST THE DIVISION'S INCOMING MAIL. A HOOTCH MAID ONCE MADE OFF WITH HIS PLASTIC LOVE DOLL AND THERE WAS HELL TO PAY.